

Research Article

Fostering Inclusivity in Christian Education: Queer-Womanist Pedagogical Practices

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Abstract: Traditional doctrines and patriarchal structures within Christian education often constrain discussions on gender and sexuality, limiting the inclusive expression of faith identity. Grounded in feminist and queer pedagogical theories, this study addresses how faith communities can translate progressive, inclusive theology into active educational practices to challenge heteronormative exclusion. Utilizing a qualitative grounded theory research design following the Corbin and Strauss model, data were gathered from a purposive sample of 18 informants, comprising 10 Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF) students and 8 Christian educators at the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)-Ekklesia in Mandurriao, Iloilo City. Data collection involved semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field notes, and memoing journals. The emergent findings reveal four primary thematic constructs: teaching inclusivity (by presenting queer ideas and mainstreaming marginalized voices), addressing gender roles (through gender-neutral divine language and SOGIE dialogues), facilitating faith sharing (by personalizing biblical narratives), and navigating persistent structural and theological barriers to full acceptance. The study concludes that intentionally combining queer-affirming and womanist perspectives can foster deeply transformative and equitable learning environments; however, moving from mere tolerance to radical acceptance remains an ongoing process that relies heavily on active pastoral engagement, progressive leadership, and deliberate pedagogical intervention.

Keywords: inclusive Christian education; queer pedagogy; womanist pedagogy

1. Introduction

Education, faith, and identity have long intersected in shaping how individuals understand themselves, their purpose, and their relationship with the Divine. Within Christian communities, however, discussions on gender and sexuality often remain challenging, constrained by traditional doctrines, patriarchal interpretations, and heteronormative norms that limit inclusive expression (Lin, 2017). These frameworks have historically determined who is considered worthy of belonging and who is excluded, thereby influencing how faith-based education constructs moral and spiritual identity (Prill, 2016). Yet, Christian education also possesses transformative potential as a space where theology and pedagogy can converge to promote inclusivity, empathy, and justice (Hamill, 2025; Slater & Cornwall, 2022). The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) serves as a progressive example of this transformation. In 2014, during its 10th Quadrennial General Assembly and 65th founding anniversary, the UCCP reaffirmed its commitment to inclusivity through the policy statement “Let Grace Be Total” (Jaropillo, 2017). This declaration recognized that all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, are embraced by God’s grace. In doing so, the UCCP sought to challenge centuries of exclusion and moral judgment directed toward LGBTQ+ individuals, calling instead for a theology rooted in love, justice, and radical acceptance (National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 2017).

Despite these progressive efforts, the integration of inclusive theology into Christian educational practice remains a complex and continuing challenge. Faith-based learning environments often reflect broader societal structures that reinforce binary understandings of gender and sustain patriarchal authority (Arivia, 2016; Epping, 2022). Within this context, pedagogical practices play a vital role in either perpetuating exclusion or fostering inclusion (Destari et al., 2025; Nemi Neto, 2018). This raises a critical question: What pedagogical practices in Christian education can effectively engage both queer and women-centered

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perspectives in teaching about faith, gender, and sexuality? Queer and feminist pedagogies provide critical frameworks for addressing this question (Bhowmik, 2025). Feminist pedagogy highlights the experiences of women, challenging patriarchal hierarchies and encouraging transformative, dialogical learning that emphasizes equality and empowerment (Arivia, 2016; Darder et al., 2003; Gaskell, 1984). Queer pedagogy, on the other hand, seeks to disrupt normative assumptions about identity and knowledge, prompting learners to question binary frameworks that have long confined both theology and education (Destari et al., 2025; Lin, 2017; Nemi Neto, 2018). When these pedagogical approaches are combined, they offer an opportunity for Christian education to become a liberating force that values diversity, challenges oppression, and nurtures a sense of belonging within the faith community (Hamill, 2025; Slater & Cornwall, 2022).

Grounded in these theoretical intersections, this study explores the pedagogical practices within Christian education that embody the principles of queer and women pedagogy in relation to faith, gender, and sexuality. Focusing on the United Church of Christ in the Philippines-Ekklesia in Mandurriao, Iloilo City, this research seeks to identify, describe, and analyze how inclusive teaching practices are conceptualized and implemented within a faith community committed to radical inclusivity. By drawing from theology, feminist and queer pedagogical theory, and inclusive education, this study aims to illuminate how faith-based learning can be both spiritually grounded and socially transformative. It examines how Christian educators interpret and translate inclusive theology into classroom or congregational practices, and how these pedagogical efforts reshape understandings of gender, sexuality, and faith identity. Ultimately, this study envisions a Christian educational framework where faith and inclusivity coexist harmoniously, creating learning environments that reflect acceptance, justice, and grace for all individuals within the faith community.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, which focused on understanding human experiences by exploring their depth, meaning, and context rather than measuring them numerically. This approach was deemed appropriate for the present study as it sought to examine how individuals interpreted and navigated their realities within the intersection of faith, gender, and inclusive education (Busetto et al., 2020). Specifically, the research utilized the grounded theory to systematically derive theoretical insights from the participants' lived experiences. Grounded theory did not begin with a preconceived framework but instead allowed theory to emerge directly from the data, ensuring that findings were firmly anchored in real-life experiences (Stough & Lee, 2021). This methodological approach enabled the researcher to explore how faith communities could meaningfully engage with Queer and womanist pedagogies while remaining faithful to theological values and inclusive principles. Grounded theory's inductive process supported the development of a theory that reflected the realities of individuals in faith-based educational settings, particularly those who had been historically marginalized due to gender and sexuality.

2.2. Instruments

The study utilized semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion (FGD) protocols as primary research instruments. These tools were designed to elicit rich, descriptive data from both Christian educators and Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF) students. The interview guide for Christian educators consisted of open-ended questions exploring their experiences and perceptions of inclusive Christian education. The guide followed four stages: preliminary, rapport-building, exploratory, and exit, ensuring that participants were comfortable sharing detailed insights (Adams, 2015). Meanwhile, the FGD protocol for CYF students encouraged collective reflection and dialogue. It included three parts: (1) an introduction and consent briefing, (2) preliminary questions about general Sunday School experiences, and (3) topic-specific questions addressing inclusivity, gender, and faith-based learning (Zacharia et al., 2021). Supplementary instruments included field notes and memoing journals, which documented observations, non-verbal cues, and researcher reflections throughout the data collection process (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). These materials enhanced the depth and authenticity of the data by capturing

contextual and interpretive details that went beyond spoken responses.

2.3. Informants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a method that identifies individuals who possess specific characteristics relevant to the study (Stratton, 2024). This approach ensured that participants could provide meaningful and contextually grounded insights on inclusive Christian education. A total of 18 informants participated in the study, comprising 10 CYF students (table 1) and 8 Christian educators (table 2) from UCCP-Ekklesia in Mandurriao, Iloilo City. The CYF students were selected based on two criteria: (1) active participation in the Youth Sunday School program and (2) age range between 18 and 30 years. These criteria ensured that participants had direct experiences with faith-based learning.

Table 1. Christian youth fellowship informants.

Alias	Sex
Rhea	Female
Seth	Male
Kevin	Male
Alicia	Female
Andrea	Female
Tintin	Female
Jana	Female
Kurt	Male
Manoy	Male
Gino	Male

The Christian educators, on the other hand, were chosen for their leadership roles and contributions to faith education within their local churches. They met the following conditions: (1) completion of the UCCP Western Visayas Conference lay formation program, (2) active involvement in the Board of Christian Education or Board of Elders, and (3) direct participation in the design or supervision of Christian education programs.

Table 2. Christian educators from UCCP-Ekklesia.

Alias	Sex	Designation
Ben	Male	Youth Elder
Elizabeth	Female	Former Christian Education and Nurture Chair
Elise	Female	Sunday School Teacher
Joshua	Male	Sunday School Teacher
Albert	Male	Sunday School Teacher
Joy	Female	Sunday School Teacher
Faye	Female	Sunday School Teacher
Jean	Female	Sunday School Teacher

To ensure ethical sensitivity given the discussion of gender and faith, only non-identifying information (alias, gender, and role) was included to safeguard participant confidentiality.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data gathering, a formal letter of request was sent to the Chairperson of the Christian Education Board of UCCP-Ekklesia, detailing the study's purpose, scope, and ethical considerations. Upon approval, participants were oriented about the study's objectives and provided with informed consent forms, while CYF students also signed assent forms where applicable. Data collection employed five complementary methods. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with Christian educators using a semi-structured format and audio-recorded with permission; each interview proceeded through four stages – preliminary, rapport-building, exploratory, and exit – and provided an opportunity for educators to articulate their insights on inclusive faith-based education. Secondly, FGDs were organized

with CYF students to foster dialogue, reflection, and shared meaning-making about collective learning experiences; the session was facilitated by a trained moderator and documented through video recording and written field notes. Thirdly, field notes were systematically maintained by the researcher, capturing observations on classroom dynamics, non-verbal communication, and contextual nuances within Sunday School environments. (4) Memoing was applied throughout both data collection and analysis phases to record emerging ideas, researcher reflections, and theoretical connections that developed over time (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). (5) While most sessions were conducted face-to-face at UCCP-Ekklesia, some interviews were held online via secure video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility, flexibility, and participant safety; ethical guidelines were consistently observed across all formats. All sessions were transcribed, translated, and coded for analysis. Data confidentiality was ensured in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, with all materials securely stored in encrypted digital folders. Upon completion, audio and video recordings were permanently deleted, and only anonymized transcripts were retained for academic purposes.

2.5. Data Analysis

The study adopted the grounded theory model which was developed by Corbin and Strauss (2014) as its analytical framework. This systematic and iterative approach enabled the generation of theoretical insights grounded in participants' lived experiences through progressive stages of coding and conceptual development (Stough & Lee, 2021). The analytical process involved the following steps: (1) Generating Codes entailed reading transcripts multiple times and segmenting them into meaningful units, with descriptive codes assigned to capture significant ideas or actions expressed by participants. (2) Identifying Concepts involved clustering related codes to form preliminary conceptual groupings, supported by memoing and consistent cross-referencing with original transcripts for validation. (3) Developing Categories required synthesizing interrelated concepts into broader, more abstract groupings that captured the complexity of the data; peer debriefing sessions contributed to refining and validating these categories. (4) Refining Themes involved merging and articulating categories into major thematic constructs that reflected both the shared and unique experiences of participants, supported by direct quotations to preserve authenticity and depth. (5) Theoretical Sorting compared, integrated, and connected themes to establish relational patterns, employing constant comparative analysis to ensure theoretical coherence and analytical rigor. (6) Generating Theory concluded the analysis by synthesizing refined themes and categories into a grounded theory that explained how faith communities could integrate queer and womanist perspectives within inclusive Christian pedagogy. Throughout the analytic process, the researcher maintained active engagement with the data, ensuring that the emergent theory remained faithful to participants' lived realities and contributed meaningful insights toward advancing inclusive Christian education.

3. Results

This study explored how pedagogical practices in Christian education intersect with queer-affirming and womanist perspectives, highlighting approaches that valued learners' individuality, promoted inclusivity, and fostered holistic spiritual and personal development. The findings are organized into four main themes: (1) teaching inclusivity, (2) addressing gender roles, (3) facilitating faith sharing, and (4) challenges in integrating non-traditional beliefs, each with corresponding subthemes (figure 1).

3.1. Teaching Inclusivity

Inclusive teaching within Christian education emphasizes creating learning spaces where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to participate fully. These approaches operationalize foundational Christian principles that honor each individual as a bearer of the divine image (*Imago Dei*) (Kieser & Parsons, 2013; Anderson, 2010). Within UCCP-Ekklesia, teaching inclusivity manifests through deliberate pedagogical efforts to introduce counter-hegemonic ideas, elevate marginalized voices, and construct equitable group learning dynamics.

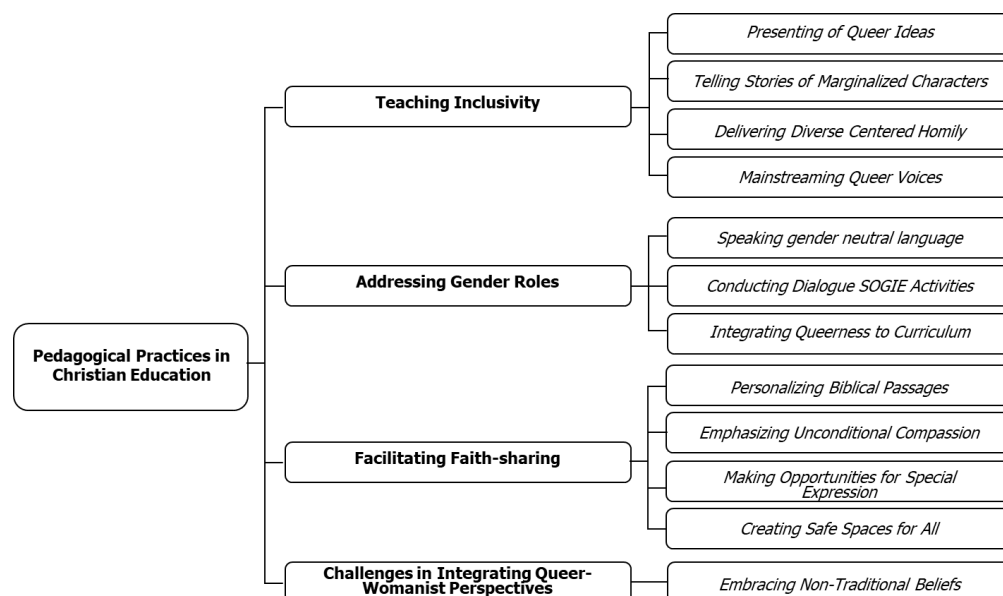


Figure 1. Pedagogical practices in Christian education.

3.1.1. Presenting Queer Ideas

Participants highlighted the nuanced challenges of introducing queer perspectives into congregational learning environments that operate within historically conservative broader church networks. JC, a youth worker in the Western Visayas Ecumenical Youth Fellowship, illustrated a proactive pedagogical intervention by sharing his lived experience as a queer Christian during an LGBT Worship Service hosted at UCCP-Ekklesia. This practice exemplifies queer pedagogy by using first-person testimony to disrupt conventional theological assumptions and normalize non-heteronormative identities within a liturgical framework (Nemi Neto, 2018).

However, the introduction of these ideas often contends with deeply ingrained conservative norms. Ben, a member of the CYF, contextualized the congregational atmosphere when discussing the wider fellowship: “I would describe it as conservative. So, it is not easy to talk about queer matters in the church... inclusivity is difficult in the church.” – Ben, CYF member.

Ben’s observation underscores the operational tension between institutional tolerance and true theological integration. While open discussions occur in specific, dedicated spaces, broader congregational culture maintains a degree of ideological resistance. Interpreted through critical educational theory, this difficulty demonstrates how historical patterns of silencing marginalized groups linger, requiring educators to continuously negotiate ideological boundaries when introducing queer content (Lin, 2017).

3.1.2. Telling Stories of Marginalized Characters

Effective inclusive pedagogy at UCCP-Ekklesia extends beyond formal instruction to encompass relational, entry-level engagement with youth. Faye, a Sunday School teacher, described how she explicitly greets and welcomes new learners to establish an immediate culture of belonging before formal instruction begins: “Before we start Sunday school... I personally approach new youth and say, ‘You are very welcome here, regardless of your gender; in our church, everyone is truly welcomed.’” – Faye, Sunday School teacher.

Faye’s practice represents an intentional pedagogical strategy designed to dismantle real and perceived barriers to entry for marginalized individuals. By verbally affirming gender inclusivity at the onset of a learning session, the educator actively counters the systemic anxiety many LGBTQ+ youth experience in faith-based settings. This approach aligns with feminist pedagogy’s emphasis on creating welcoming, relational learning environments that validate personal identity as a prerequisite for meaningful spiritual formation (Arivia, 2016; Darder et al., 2003).

3.1.3. Delivering Diverse-Centered Homily

While informal and youth-led spaces within UCCP-Ekklesia demonstrate explicit inclusivity, participants noted that formal instructional moments, specifically pulpit preaching and homiletics, exhibit significant gaps in representation. Jana reflected on the visual and thematic disparity present during official worship services: “Here in UCCP-Ekklesia... outside of sermons, representation of women and queer individuals is not as much... mostly patriarchal structure and focus.” – Jana, CYF member.

Jana’s critique reveals a structural disconnect between the progressive informal activities of the youth fellowship and the traditional homiletical practices of the broader church. In educational terms, this represents a curriculum divide where the “official curriculum” delivered from the pulpit remains anchored in patriarchal structures, while the “hidden or informal curriculum” of youth ministry fosters inclusive dialogue. To achieve holistic pedagogical transformation, critical educators argue that homiletics must system-atically integrate diverse narratives, moving away from androcentric interpretations of scripture (Arivia, 2016; Bhowmik, 2025).

3.1.4. Mainstreaming Queer Voices

Despite pulpit limitations, the internal pedagogical practices of the CYF demonstrate active strategies for mainstreaming queer voices through structural group design and pastoral openness. Kurt explained how youth leaders intentionally structure learning groups to dismantle gender bias: “...We already have members who are part of the LGBTQ community... For activities and discussions, we mix genders to avoid bias.” – Kurt, CYF member.

This intentional mixing of genders disrupts traditional binary subgroupings that historically reinforced gender segregation in church ministries. Complementing this structural approach, Rhea highlighted how pastoral accessibility fosters psychological safety: “...you are very open, and we are more comfortable compared to other places that are super strict...” – Rhea, CYF member.

Additionally, Seth observed the impact of non-judgmental theological foundations on youth engagement: “...We do not judge anyone based on their status in life, whether you are a minority or even LGBT... all are children of God and everyone is equal.” – Seth, Sunday School participant.

Collectively, these accounts demonstrate that mainstreaming marginalized voices relies on a dual approach: structural design that enforces equal participation (Kurt), and leadership attitudes that communicate radical acceptance (Rhea, Seth). These practices operationalize the UCCP’s “Let Grace Be Total” policy at the micro-level, transforming abstract theological declarations into lived pedagogical realities (Jaropillo, 2017).

3.2. Addressing Gender Roles

Addressing entrenched gender roles requires deliberate instructional mechanisms that challenge patriarchal authority, reconstruct exclusive language, and transform traditional organizational hierarchies. At UCCP-Ekklesia, educators and youth leaders utilize linguistic modification, interactive sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) workshops, and equitable leadership distribution to cultivate an egalitarian educational environment.

3.2.1. Speaking Gender-Neutral Language

Language serves as a primary medium through which theological and gender norms are communicated and reinforced. Participants reported that UCCP-Ekklesia educators deliberately adapt traditional liturgical and prayer language to reflect a non-patriarchal understanding of the Divine. Elizabeth detailed this linguistic transformation: “...We use ‘Our Parent God’ instead of ‘Our Father’... inclusive... we believe that our Lord God is not just a father but also a mothering God.” – Elizabeth, CYF member.

This deliberate shift from exclusive patriarchal terminology (“Father”) to relational, expansive language (“Parent God,” “mothering God”) serves as a critical pedagogical intervention. By altering the linguistic framing of the Divine, educators challenge the historical association between deity and masculinity, directly embodying feminist theological pedagogy

(Arivia, 2016). This practice helps learners unlearn rigid gender hierarchies, allowing both women and non-binary individuals to see their identities reflected in the divine image (Epping, 2022).

3.2.2. Conducting Dialogue and SOGIE Activities

Beyond linguistic shifts, the church incorporates active, dialogic instructional strategies designed to increase literacy surrounding gender and sexuality. Kurt emphasized the role of structured group dynamics in facilitating these educational activities: “...For activities and discussions, we mix genders to avoid bias.” – Kurt, CYF member.

By organizing SOGIE workshops and small-group discussions using gender-inclusive seating and group assignments, leaders prevent the formation of echo chambers and break down traditional gender divisions. This methodology draws directly from critical pedagogy, which posits that dialogue across difference is essential for raising consciousness and dismantling social bias (Darder et al., 2003). These structured encounters compel participants to engage directly with diverse lived experiences, transforming theoretical concepts of equality into practical, relational learning.

3.2.3. Integrating Queerness into Curriculum

A comprehensive approach to addressing gender roles requires institutionalizing inclusivity within both educational materials and organizational structures. Elizabeth explained how leadership practices within the church reflect an open, non-restrictive policy: “...We have women pastors... we don’t limit it to just one gender. We include everyone – whether you’re a woman, a man, or part of the LGBTQ community.” – Elizabeth, CYF member.

The visible presence of women pastors and LGBTQ+ leaders functions as an embodied curriculum. In educational contexts, who teaches is as critical as what is taught. By placing women and queer individuals in authoritative ministry roles, UCCP-Ekklesia destabilizes patriarchal assumptions regarding spiritual authority (Gaskell, 1984). This structural integration provides youth with tangible models of inclusive leadership, demonstrating that faith communities can transcend historical gender constraints (Prill, 2016).

3.3. *Facilitating Faith Sharing*

Faith-sharing practices within inclusive Christian education must balance theological rigor with empathetic, learner-centered pastoral care. At UCCP-Ekklesia, educators facilitate faith formation through the contextualization of scripture, the operationalization of unconditional grace, the provision of leadership opportunities for marginalized youth, and the intentional creation of safe learning spaces.

3.3.1. Personalizing Biblical Passages

Contextualizing sacred texts is a key pedagogical strategy for making ancient scriptures relevant to contemporary, diverse youth identities. Faye described her intentional, reflective preparation process as a Sunday School educator: “...I also pray that I can deliver my lessons well... You are very welcome here, regardless of your gender.” – Faye, Sunday School teacher.

Faye’s approach combines personal spiritual preparation with inclusive instructional delivery. Rather than presenting biblical texts as rigid, dogmatic mandates, she frames scriptural interpretation around principles of universal welcome. This method mirrors queer and liberationist hermeneutics, which encourage educators to read scripture through the lens of marginalized experiences, thereby transforming the text into an instrument of empowerment rather than exclusion (Slater & Cornwall, 2022).

3.3.2. Emphasizing Unconditional Compassion

Pedagogical practices at UCCP-Ekklesia are deeply informed by a theology of unconditional compassion, directly reflecting the denominational mandate “Let Grace Be Total” (Jaropillo, 2017). Seth articulated how this theological orientation shapes the learning culture among participants: “...We do not judge anyone based on their status in life, whether you are a minority or even LGBT... all are children of God and everyone is equal.” – Seth, Sunday School participant.

Seth’s reflection demonstrates that learners internalize an ontology of radical equality when instructional environments prioritize compassion over moral judgment. By framing every student as an equal “child of God,” the educational framework removes performance-

based or identity-based conditions for divine acceptance. This non-judgmental atmosphere is essential for creating psychological safety, enabling learners to engage in authentic spiritual exploration without fear of rejection (Hamill, 2025).

3.3.3. Making Opportunities for Special Expression

Inclusivity is further sustained by providing structured opportunities for LGBTQ+ youth to express their gifts and assume operational responsibility within the faith community. Kurt detailed the active inclusion of queer youth in executive leadership roles: “...We try to involve them as part of the official CYF. Our vice president is even part of the LGBTQ community.” – Kurt, CYF member.

Entrusting LGBTQ+ youth with significant organizational roles such as the vice presidency of the fellowship, moves the ministry beyond passive inclusion toward active empowerment. This operational strategy embodies feminist pedagogical principles by redistributing institutional power and validating the agency of historically marginalized individuals (Arivia, 2016; Bhowmik, 2025). It demonstrates to the broader congregation that queer members are not merely beneficiaries of inclusion, but active co-creators of the faith community.

3.3.4. Creating Safe Spaces for All

The synthesis of empathetic pedagogy, inclusive language, and shared leadership creates what participants consistently described as a “safe space.” Rhea articulated how this environment distinguishes UCCP-Ekklesia from more rigid religious institutions: “...you are very open, and we are more comfortable compared to other places that are super strict...” – Rhea, CYF member.

Rhea’s testimony highlights the contrast between traditional authoritarian Christian education and transformative, inclusive pedagogy. The openness of the pastoral leadership lowers emotional barriers, fostering a comfortable space for spiritual and personal growth. In educational scholarship, such safe spaces are recognized as foundational for critical learning, as they allow participants to navigate complex intersections of faith, gender, and sexuality without fear of punitive judgment (Destari et al., 2025; Hamill, 2025).

3.4. *Challenges in Integrating Non-Traditional Beliefs*

Despite progressive institutional policies and dedicated local pedagogical efforts, participants identified significant structural, cultural, and theological challenges to fully integrating non-traditional beliefs into the broader church life. These barriers illustrate the ongoing friction between progressive policy and traditional practice.

3.4.1. Embracing Non-Traditional Beliefs

A primary challenge involves overcoming the entrenched patriarchal structures that continue to dominate formal church spaces outside the youth fellowship. Jana articulated this persistent imbalance: “...outside of sermons, representation of women and queer individuals is not as much... mostly patriarchal structure and focus.” – Jana, CYF member.

Jana’s observation underscores that pedagogical progress made within youth spaces does not automatically transform adult or administrative church structures. The institutional focus often defaults to traditional, patriarchal norms, limiting the broader visibility and influence of women and LGBTQ+ individuals. This structural inertia highlights the need for systemic pedagogical interventions that target all levels of church leadership, rather than confining inclusive practices to youth ministries (Lin, 2017).

Furthermore, participants noted that shifting congregational culture from superficial tolerance to genuine theological acceptance remains a formidable task. Ben captured this reality concisely: “...inclusivity is difficult in the church.” – Ben, CYF member.

Ben’s statement reflects the systemic friction that occurs when progressive theological concepts encounter deeply rooted traditional beliefs. Even in a denomination committed to radical grace, individual members and leaders may hold conservative views that impede full inclusion. This ongoing difficulty demonstrates that achieving radical inclusivity is not a single institutional event, but an iterative, challenging educational process that requires continuous dialogue, courage, and deliberate pedagogical effort (Bhowmik, 2025; Destari et al., 2025).

4. Discussion

This study explored how pedagogical practices in Christian education intersect with queer-affirming and womanist perspectives. The findings were organized into four main thematic clusters: teaching inclusivity; addressing gender roles; facilitating faith sharing; and challenges in integrating non-traditional beliefs. These themes were further divided into subthemes, illustrating nuanced approaches to inclusive pedagogy, leadership equity, and the challenges faced by faith communities in embracing diverse identities.

Teaching Inclusivity in Christian education highlights the importance of creating learning environments where all learners feel recognized, valued, and supported. Participants emphasized strategies such as presenting queer ideas, telling stories of marginalized characters, delivering diverse-centered homilies, and mainstreaming queer voices. These practices were rooted in the Christian principle that every individual is created in the image of God (Anderson, 2010; Kieser & Parsons, 2013). Emotional engagement and pastoral openness emerged as crucial factors, with participants like JC, Kurt, and Rhea illustrating how leadership attitudes directly influenced the degree of acceptance and belonging experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in church-based learning spaces.

Addressing Gender Roles revealed deliberate efforts to challenge patriarchal norms within church structures, leadership positions, and language practices. The subthemes of speaking gender-neutral language, conducting dialogue and SOGIE activities, and integrating queerness into the curriculum demonstrated how educators and church leaders could create more equitable environments. For instance, using inclusive terminology such as “Our Parent God” signaled the acknowledgment of both male and female aspects of divinity, fostering a sense of belonging and visibility for women and queer members alike. Similarly, the inclusion of women pastors and LGBTQ+ individuals in leadership roles reflected structural shifts that challenged traditional gender hierarchies and promoted equitable participation.

Facilitating Faith Sharing underscored the pedagogical practice of personalizing spiritual experiences to promote empathy, moral development, and inclusive engagement. Subthemes including personalizing biblical passages, emphasizing unconditional compassion, making opportunities for special expression, and creating safe spaces illustrated how CYF programs actively nurtured belonging and participation. Participants’ narratives, such as those from Faye, Seth, and Kurt, revealed that when youth were given space to share, lead, and connect Scripture to their lived experiences, faith learning became both inclusive and transformative. These practices reflect how intentional pedagogy in faith contexts can strengthen community bonds while honoring diverse identities.

Despite progressive efforts, Challenges in Integrating Non-Traditional Beliefs emerged as significant barriers. Patriarchal norms, conservative theological interpretations, and social stigma limited the full integration of queer-affirming and womanist perspectives. Participants like Jana and Ben highlighted how discussions about gender and sexuality were still met with hesitation or discomfort, underscoring the need for deliberate pedagogical strategies and leadership openness to create truly inclusive faith spaces. These findings suggest that while inclusive practices are possible, they require sustained effort, structural support, and active pastoral engagement.

Although this research provides insight into how Christian education can intersect with queer-affirming and womanist pedagogies, several limitations should be considered. Firstly, the informants were limited to participants within a specific faith community, so the findings may not fully generalize to other churches or denominations. Secondly, the study used a qualitative approach, and future research could incorporate quantitative methods to examine the prevalence and impact of inclusive pedagogical practices across larger populations. Thirdly, participants were primarily youth and CYF members, which may not reflect the experiences of older adults or clergy in other contexts. Fourthly, the study focused on pedagogical practices within the Philippine setting; similar research in other cultural or national contexts may yield different results. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a robust foundation for understanding how Christian education can foster inclusivity, gender equity, and holistic development in faith-based learning spaces, offering guidance for future research and practice.

5. Conclusions

Christian education that intentionally integrates queer-affirming and feminist

perspectives demonstrates profound potential to foster inclusive, equitable, and spiritually enriching learning environments. By examining the pedagogical dynamics at the UCCP-Ekklesia in Mandurriao, Iloilo City, this study highlights how faith-based instruction can transcend traditional dogmatic boundaries to enact radical belonging. Learners' individuality, diverse gender identities, and lived experiences are recognized and valued through intentional instructional practices, including presenting marginalized voices, actively deconstructing traditional gender roles, facilitating empathetic faith sharing, and promoting inclusive leadership. These strategies operationalize the theological mandate of "Let Grace Be Total," proving that critical pedagogy and Christian formation can coexist harmoniously to nourish both social justice and spiritual growth. However, significant challenges persist within conservative and patriarchal institutional structures, where superficial tolerance frequently replaces genuine theological acceptance. The tension between progressive youth-led initiatives and entrenched adult congregational norms reveals that policy declarations alone are insufficient without continuous, reflective pedagogical implementation. To overcome these barriers, faith-based institutions must move beyond passive acceptance by embedding inclusive principles directly into their curricular frameworks, administrative policies, and daily community interactions. By systematically adopting gender-expansive language, establishing safe spaces for open dialogue, and ensuring equitable representation across all levels of church leadership, faith communities can cultivate transformative environments where all members feel seen, respected, and divine-reflecting. Ultimately, this research emphasizes that inclusivity in Christian education is not a static achievement but an ongoing, active process shaped by courageous leadership, critical pedagogy, and sustained community engagement. Extending this framework offers a viable path toward breaking historical cycles of exclusion, providing a foundation for broader social acceptance, and realizing the liberating promise of faith-based education for every individual, ensuring that faith spaces remain sites of profound holistic transformation. Consequently, future research and praxis must continue to critically examine these evolving dynamics, fostering environments where radical inclusion and theological integrity remain inseparable pillars of spiritual education.

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