

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

**Rinalynn L. Borito**

Ph.D. College of Education

---

**ABSTRACT:** This paper was pursued to determine if gender-inclusive language is used in office communications of a higher educational institution in Laguna, and from the results may propose an action plan to sustain or improve the gender and development programs of the university. Using the descriptive method, office communications in the form of memos and employees from the focal office were evaluated if they utilized gender-inclusive language as stated in the Magna Carta of Women.

The results of the study showed that only 4% of office communication does not use gender-inclusive language. Also, the findings showed that 100% of the employee respondents in the Human Resources Department scored low on the Gender Inclusive Language Test, interpreted as being unaware of gender-inclusive language. It is then concluded that the higher educational institution in Laguna utilizes gender-inclusive language in its office communication in the form of business correspondences and office memos. The researcher recommends that the action plan proposed be implemented. Also, the Gender and Development Department should create programs and policies and be actively in charge of all concerns regarding gender development, awareness, and sensitivity. This research endeavors that the budget allocated for gender and development in the university be properly utilized in the form of training and seminars which may, among its programs, focus on gender sensitivity and gender-inclusive language.

**KEYWORDS:** gender-inclusive language, gender, and development, office communications

---

### INTRODUCTION

Republic Act (RA) 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women states in CHAPTER IV RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT, SEC. 13. that “The State shall ensure that gender stereotypes and images in educational materials and curricula are adequately and appropriately revised. The gender-sensitive language shall be used at all times. Capacity-building on gender and development (GAD), peace and human rights, education for teachers, and all those involved in the education sector shall be pursued toward this end. Partnerships between and among players of the education sector, including the private sector, churches, and faith groups shall be encouraged”.

The US Department of Labor has included in its Policies on Gender Identity under Responsibilities of Managers and Supervisors, the use of inclusive language, that, “Whenever possible, use gender-neutral language to avoid assumptions about employees' sexual orientation or gender identity. For instance, use words like "spouse" instead of gender-specific terms like "husband" or "wife," or the singular third-person pronoun "they" instead of "he or she" when referencing a hypothetical or anonymous person, or when you don't know the person's pronouns. In addition, be mindful in referring to individuals' identity, gender, partners, and relationships. Someone's sexual orientation or gender identity is one aspect of their identity, but not what may fully define them”.

Likewise, the United Nations, on its website, has come up with guidelines on gender-inclusive language to put them into practice.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) came out in 2015 with CMO No. 01, “Establishing the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)”, hence the inclusion of GAD101-Gender and Development, in the university's enhanced General Education subjects. Part of the curriculum is a discussion on gender-fair language.

Similarly, the use of gender-fair, gender-neutral, or gender-inclusive language is emphasized in the memorandum released by the Civil Service Commission thru CSC MC 12, s2005 which states that “under CSC Resolution No. 050433 dated March 30, 2005, government officials and employees are encouraged to use non-sexist language in all official documents, communications, and issuance.”

There have been a few studies conducted on the use of gender-inclusive language. Locally, the study of Remigio and Talosa (2021) covered students' attitudes toward gender-inclusive language. However, particularly in Laguna, there were no studies

---

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

conducted on the use of gender-inclusive language in office communications at a local university.

Currently, Pamantasan ng Cabuyao has a Gender and Development Department (GDD). This department has been formerly called Gender and Development Office in SY 2021-2022. Before that, the university did not have an office except for a Focal Person assigned each school year. With this instability and need for an office, it is understandable that policies and programs to consistently implement these do not take place. Further, there has been no study conducted to look into the implementation of CSC MC12 s2005 in offices of academic institutions.

Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, the locale of the study, currently houses several administrative offices, but for this research, the Human Resource Department is the focal area for consistency purposes.

This study looked into the practice of using gender-inclusive language in office communications in the last five years of Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, a local university funded by the City Government of Cabuyao, Laguna. Focus on the Human Resource Department was done since most of the memoranda covering employee concerns come from this office.

This paper studied the office memos released by the Human Resource Department and checked if these followed the mandates of CSC MC12, s2005. Specifically, this study focused on the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of gender-inclusivity of the memoranda released by the Human Resource Department;
2. To find out if the employees in the Human Resource Department get passing scores on the quiz for gender-inclusive language; and
3. To propose an action plan that may improve or sustain compliance with gender-inclusive language.

This research looked into the connection between the gender-inclusive language used in creating office memorandums and the awareness of those who created the office memos; if there is a connection between the writer and the writing.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-inclusive language means language that does not discriminate based on sex, gender, or gender identity. The use of gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing that does not render any gender invisible and do not promote any kind of stereotype or discrimination.

The Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) mentions that “The State shall ensure that gender stereotypes and images in educational materials and curricula are adequately and appropriately revised. Gender-sensitive language shall be used at all times” (University of the Philippines, 2010).

The United Nations, on its website, has come up with a whole program to promote gender-inclusive language. The purpose of their agenda is to provide support to different agencies, including UN Women, that promote gender equality in multilingual contexts (United Nations, n.d.). As a result, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) came up with guidelines and a list of Less Inclusive and More Inclusive words (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

Relatively, the Philippine Commission on Women has created programs for the implementation of several laws on women and women’s rights. A memorandum circular promoting gender-sensitive language was released in 2014 stating that, “Language shapes thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes and, thus, plays a very crucial role in promoting gender awareness and consciousness. The use of generic masculine terms to refer to both sexes in the text of laws renders women invisible, and could result in the non-consideration of their needs and concerns in the implementation of such laws” (Philippine Commission on Women, 2014). This is in congruence with Memorandum Circular No. 12 s2005 released by the Commission on Civil Service encouraging the use of non-sexist language in all documents, forms of communications, and issuances (Civil Service Commission, 2005).

Several articles on the internet have pushed for the use of gender-inclusive language in the workplace, stating that it “fosters acceptance, inclusivity, and support in the work environment” (Rose, 2021). Similarly, the use of gender-neutral language removes the stereotypes in the workplace and makes it more welcoming to female employees holding ‘traditionally male’ job functions (STEM Women, 2021). Being included in a group, whether it be a workgroup, playgroup, or an academic group, promotes well-being and belongingness, as expressed in the study about Inclusive Language and Well-Being at Work (Perales, Ablaza, & Elkin, 2022). This is also emphasized in the article from G2, mentioning the benefits that inclusivity, like gender-neutral language, does to an employee (Drake, 2020).

Part of gender-inclusive language is simple terminologies that have been ingrained in us, like the word ‘guys’ which is used in almost all informal conversations to mean a group of people, friends, or colleagues. The word passes up as something insignificant, yet it assumes that all group of people are male which render the females invisible, as emphasized in the article, “Guys”: the new 4-letter word (and how we tried to say it less) (Bent, 2022). The word ‘guys’ is English, yet it is being used in Filipino conversations to mean the same thing, and have the same effect – masculine in meaning, rendering feminine invisible. This gender assignment of words has been desexualized in the study titled, “From Gender-Neutral to Gender-Inclusive English. The Search for Gender-Fair Language” (Ludbrook, 2022).

In the Philippines, and an academic setting, studies about gender-inclusive language have been conducted on both students and

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

teachers, measuring their general attitudes and perceptions, respectively. Student respondents were generally assessed as to their attitudes towards gender-inclusive language (Remigio & Talosa, 2021), while teacher respondents' views on gender-inclusive language were investigated (Vizcarra-Garcia, 2021). Both sets of respondents positively reacted and agreed that gender-inclusive language in an academic institution brings about sensitivity among them and supports the integration of this in their curriculum.

Locally, and specifically in Laguna, studies about gender exist but not on gender-inclusive language, as well as on the use of gender-inclusive language in office communications of an academic institution.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

This research utilized the descriptive method, where the researcher does not control or manipulate any of the variables, but only observes and measures them. This is an appropriate method to use when the research aim is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories (McCombes, 2019).

#### Respondents of the Study

Employees from the Human Resource Department answered a questionnaire to test their knowledge of the use of gender-inclusive language.

Also, office memos that were released by the Human Resource Department for the years 2018-2022 were subjected to validation and cross-referencing.

#### Instruments

For obtaining primary data for the study the researcher developed (1) a questionnaire distributed to the respondents of the Human Resource Department and (2) a checklist for the validation of the office memos released by the department for the inclusive years 2018-2022.

The questionnaire was based on an online survey measuring gender-neutral writing (Government of Canada, n.d.). There are seven (7) items and each question pertains to a statement that may or may not have used gender-inclusive language. The respondents had the option to select, "Sentence Is Correct", to mean that the sentence used gender-inclusive language; or "Sentence Has a Problem", to mean otherwise. The scores for this questionnaire have equivalent ratings about how high or low their use of gender-inclusive language is, thus identifying if they are aware or unaware, etc.

The checklist is based on the requisites of a gender-inclusive document from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). There are six parts of the questionnaire which are the basis for the use of gender-inclusive language in office communications of the Human Resources Department. The scores for this checklist have equivalent ratings on how Less Inclusive or More Inclusive their use of gender-fair language is.

#### Data Collection

Data for this research had been gathered from the results of the questionnaire distributed to the employees of the Human Resource Department, as well as the results of the validation, evaluation check of the memos released by the same office during 2018-2022.

#### Data Analysis

The self-made questionnaire is composed of seven (7) questions. An equivalent rating of the scores obtained from the questionnaire is as follows:

Score	Equivalent	Interpretation
7	Very High	Highly Aware
6	High	Aware
5	Almost High	Somewhat Aware
4	Undecided	Undecided
3	Almost Low	Somewhat Unaware
2	Low	Unaware
1	Very Low	Highly Unaware

The checklist is composed of six (6) parts to evaluate whether the office memo used Less Inclusive or More Inclusive language.

Score	Equivalent	Interpretation
6	Very High	More Inclusive
5	High	Inclusive
4	Almost High	Almost Inclusive

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

3	Almost Low	Less Inclusive
2	Low	Least Inclusive
1	Very Low	Not Inclusive

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the survey questionnaire and the checklist as primary sources of data, this research presents the following results, having investigated the gender-inclusive language used in office communication in an academic setting.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following:

1. What is the level of gender inclusivity in the memos released by the Human Resource Department?
2. Did the employees in the Human Resources Department get passing scores on the quiz for gender-inclusive language?
3. Based on the results of the study, what action plan can be proposed to improve or sustain compliance?

The following are the salient results of the research:

There were 25 office memos released from March 9, 2018, until July 5, 2022, and of these, only one (1) office memo scored 4 out of 5 statements on the checklist for gender-inclusive language. This score has an equivalent of an "Almost High" rating and an interpretation of "Almost

Inclusive". This means that only 4% of the office memos released from 2018 to 2022 did not use gender-inclusive language.

Using the United Nations guidelines on the use of gender-inclusive language, this study checked the words, phrases, and sentences in each office memo released. One particular office memo dated October 19, 2020, made use of the word, "Chairman" and violated statement 1, The memo used gender-neutral words; and statement 6, "The memo omits the gendered word and uses impersonal constructions. The word "Chairman" refers only to a male and renders the female invisible. It assumes that only males have the ability and capacity to chair a committee. Consequently, the gender-inclusive term is, chairperson.

All of the five (5) employees in the Human Resources Department of the university who took the quiz for Gender Inclusive Language garnered a score of 2 out of the 7 questions which have an equivalent rating of "Low", interpreted as "Unaware", which means that 100% of the employee respondents are "Unaware" of gender-inclusive language.

The results show that there is a need to propose an action plan that would enhance or sustain the awareness of the employee respondents in the Human Resources Department.

Also, programs and policies need to be proposed and implemented by the Gender and Development Department of the university.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

Based on the results of the research, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Of the memos released by the Human Resources Department in 2018-2022, 96% use gender-inclusive language.
2. Based on the scores from the quiz, all the employees in the Human Resources Department got a low score of 2 out of 7 questions, interpreted as "unaware" of gender-inclusive language.
3. There is a need to continuously and consistently implement the proposed action plan to enhance or sustain the use of gender-inclusive language in office communications in the Human Resources Department, as well as the entire university.

#### Recommendations

1. The Gender and Development Department should have a year-round calendar of activities for its employees and students.
2. Programs and policies to benefit all should be made public thru a memo.
3. The university, thru the Gender and Development Department, should make follow through on this study, not just for compliance purposes of the researcher, but as a basis for improvement for the current situation in the university.
4. Gender Sensitivity Training every semester must be conducted.
5. The Gender and Development Department must have enough staff to implement, monitor, and evaluate all plans, programs, and policies that are mandated by law.
6. Similar or related studies or research on gender and development should be conducted as a basis for the improvement of programs and as a basis for extension programs of the university.

### IMPLICATIONS / ACTION PLAN

As the results of the questionnaire and checklist were analyzed and interpreted, the researcher now presents the Proposed Action Plan for the Gender and Development Department.

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

ed Action Plan	Person/ Department Responsible	Resources	Timeframe	Success Indicator	Monitoring and Evaluation Scheme
Conduct online or onsite Gender Mainstreaming Training	Gender and Development Department	Budget of the University for GAD programs	Annually, from January- February	Program held with 80% attendance of employees	Post- evaluation form with results tallied and interpreted
Conduct online or onsite Gender Sensitivity Training for both employees and students			Annually, during March	Program held with 85% attendance of employees and students	
Conduct Gender Fair Language Training among employees			Annually, from April-May	Program held with 90% attendance of employees	
Gender Mandates and Law Training for GAD department officers			Annually, from August- September	Program held with 95% attendance of HR employees and staff	
Gender Budget Inclusion for GAD department officers			Annually, from October- November	100% approval of the budget	

### DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest. All authors declared that they have no conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent. All participants were appropriately informed and voluntarily agreed to the terms with full consent before taking part in the conduct of the experiment.

### REFERENCES

- Bent, S. (2022, October 31). "Guys": the new 4-letter word (and how we tried to say it less). Retrieved from Hotjar: <https://www.hotjar.com/blog/gender-inclusive-language-workplace/>
- Civil Service Commission. (2005, March 31). Retrieved from <https://www.csguide.org/>: <https://www.csguide.org/items/show/538>
- Drake, A. (2020, June 23). *An Employer's Guide to Using Gender-Inclusive Language in the Workplace*. Retrieved from learn.g2.com: <https://learn.g2.com/gender-inclusive-language>
- Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Test yourself—Gender-Neutral Writing: Questions of Usage*. Retrieved from Government of Canada: <https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/pecks-english-pointers/pep-quiz/usage-7-gender-neutral-writing-questions-usage-quiz>
- Ludbrook, G. (2022, January 1). *From Gender-Neutral to Gender-Inclusive English. The Search for Gender-Fair Language*. Retrieved from Ca'Foscari University of Venice ARCA: <https://iris.unive.it/handle/10278/5013062?mode=complete>
- McCombes, S. (2019, October 10). *Descriptive Research | Definition, Types, Methods & Examples*. Retrieved from Scribbr: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/descriptive-research/>
- Perales, F., Ablaza, C., & Elkin, N. (2022, March). Exposure to Inclusive Language and Well-Being at Work Among Transgender Employees in Australia, 2020. *American Public Health Association*. Retrieved from <https://ajph.aphapublications.org>: <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306602>
- Philippine Commission on Women. (2014, December 19). Retrieved from pcw.gov.ph: <https://pcw.gov.ph/pcw-memorandum-circular-no-2014-06-promoting-the-use-of-gender-sensitive-language-in-legislative-measures/>
- Remigio, M. T., & Talosa, A. D. (2021, September). *Students General Attitude in Gender-Inclusive Language, International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, v10 n3 p864-870 Sep 2021*. Retrieved from Institute of Education Series: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1313111>
- Rose, D. (2021, August 9). Why It's Important to Use Gender-Inclusive Language at Work. Philippines.
- STEM Women. (2021, July 2). *STEM Women*. Retrieved from stemwomen.com: <https://www.stemwomen.com/the-importance-of-gender-neutral-language-in-the-workplace>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022, October 6). *UNODC*. Retrieved from Guide: gender-inclusive communication:

## Gender-Inclusive Language of Office Communications in an Academic Setting

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/gender\\_sensitive\\_language/Gender-sensitiveCommsGuide-English-final.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/gender_sensitive_language/Gender-sensitiveCommsGuide-English-final.pdf)

- 13) United Nations. (n.d.). *un.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/index.shtml>: <https://www.un.org>
- 14) University of the Philippines. (2010, July 9). Retrieved from <https://cws.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/RA-9710-Magna-Carta-of-Women.pdf>
- 15) Vizcarra-Garcia, J. (2021, March 30). *Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Inclusive Language in the Classroom*. Retrieved from International Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Translation: <https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijllt/article/view/1410>