

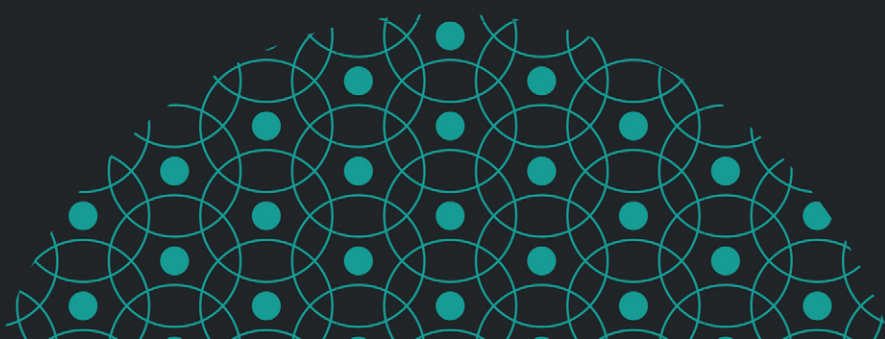


EMERALD POINTS

# QUEER TEACHERS' AGENCY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Shaping Inclusive and Equitable  
Learning Environments

**MARK BEDOYA ULLA**



QUEER TEACHERS' AGENCY IN  
LANGUAGE EDUCATION

This page intentionally left blank

# QUEER TEACHERS' AGENCY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Shaping Inclusive and Equitable  
Learning Environments

BY

**MARK BEDOYA ULLA**  
*Walailak University, Thailand*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2025

Copyright © 2025 Mark Bedoya Ulla.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83662-931-3 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83662-930-6 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83662-932-0 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This is for all the queer language teachers around the world.*

This page intentionally left blank

# CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Overview of the Book</i>	xiii
<b>Part One: Theoretical and Conceptual Backgrounds</b>	
1. Inclusion, Equality, and Teacher Agency in Education	3
2. The Importance of Teacher Agency, Queer Pedagogy, and Social Justice	21
3. Teacher Agency for Social Justice	39
4. Queer Language Teachers and Their Educational Contexts	57
<b>Part Two: Study Findings on Teacher Agency in Queer Language Pedagogy</b>	
5. Queer Teacher Agency in the Language Pedagogy	75
6. Queer Teacher Identity in Language Pedagogy	93
7. Promoting Queer Language Pedagogy	109
8. Concluding Notes: Queer Teacher Identity and Teacher Agency	127
<i>About the Author</i>	143

This page intentionally left blank

## PREFACE

Language teaching is inherently tied to the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs, often reflecting the dominant norms and values of society. In many cases, these norms are unconsciously reproduced in the language classroom, resulting in the perpetuation of heteronormative practices. Such practices marginalize queer teachers and students that result to limiting their ability to challenge societal norms and assert their identities. Thus, this book arises from the urgent need to address these systemic issues, framing its exploration through a critical lens and approaching it from a social justice perspective.

The significance of this work lies in its challenge to the status quo of language education, particularly regarding the exclusion of gender-diverse individuals from institutional policies and classroom curricula. The aim is not only to foreground the experiences and perspectives of queer language teachers but also to advance our understanding of queer language pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of recognizing queer identities in the classroom. This book serves as a vital resource for education practitioners, applied linguistics scholars, graduate and postgraduate students, researchers, and policymakers, providing valuable insights, applications, and recommendations for addressing and recognizing the experiences and unique needs of queer language teachers.

Through the empirical studies and theoretical discussions presented, this book seeks to empower queer language teachers by amplifying their voices and recognizing them as key agents of change, a fundamental drive of social justice in education. These teachers play a pivotal role in promoting equity, inclusivity, and the acceptance of diverse gender identities within language pedagogy by challenging heteronormativity in English language teaching. This book also offers practical classroom activities and strategies not only to improve teachers' professional practices but also to contribute to a more inclusive educational environment.

Additionally, the exploration of queer language teacher agency, as revealed in the second part of this book, showed how these queer teachers navigate the intersection of their professional and personal identities while confronting systemic heteronormativity. The journey toward recognition of and embracing

fully one's identity without biases and prejudices in the language classroom is still a long way to go, but it is my hope that this book will inspire other queer language teachers to fully exercise their agency, advocating for social justice in their classrooms and beyond. As teachers, we have the agency to advocate for acceptance and inclusion through our own classroom practices that our students may bring outside the classroom.

On a personal level, this book holds deep significance for me as a queer, nonbinary language teacher. In other words, this book is more than just an academic exploration. It is also a personal journey into the core of queer language pedagogy. My identity has profoundly shaped the exploration of concepts such as queer language teacher agency, identity, and queer language pedagogy presented here. While I bring my own perspective and experiences to this work, and while I may have gained some understanding of the challenges and opportunities that queer language teachers face, I am aware of the limitations in my knowledge, especially regarding how other queer teachers exercise their agency to promote social justice. My journey has been one of continuous learning, particularly in seeking to understand how other queer language teachers perceive and exercise their agency and how they are empowered – or not – to promote social justice in their language classrooms.

This book challenges me to not only satisfy my academic curiosity but also to shed light on the issue of teacher agency for social justice, particularly in the context of queer language pedagogy. It is a call to action for teachers, scholars, and policymakers to listen to the voices of queer language teachers, acknowledge their struggles, and support their efforts to create a more just and inclusive world through language education.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As they say, writing a book has always been a lonely journey because not only does one have to go through this process alone, but one also has to struggle with the emotional and mental exhaustion that comes with it. Finishing this book is like completing the *Odyssey*, like Odysseus, who battled for years and returned home alive.

In completing this work, whenever I feel mentally and physically drained from making sense of what I am doing, I am always reminded of the people who believed in me and continued to be the source of my motivation and inspiration. These are the people who, one way or another, have become instrumental in finishing this book. Thus, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the many individuals who have contributed to the success of this book-writing odyssey.

First and foremost, I am sincerely grateful to **Dr. Stephenie Busbus** for her unwavering guidance, trust, and encouragement throughout this journey.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues who have become instrumental in making this book: **Dr. John Amtalao, Dr. Elaine Grace Dizon, Dr. Mary Jane Najarila, Dr. Veronico Tarrayo, Dr. Jonathan Carreon, and Dr. Geraldine Wakat.**

I am profoundly grateful to **Mr. William Perales**, whose support, encouragement, love, understanding, and motivation fueled my perseverance during the most challenging times.

To all the queer language teachers who willingly gave their time for the interviews and classroom observation, thank you for your openness and willingness to share your experiences. Your voices are at the heart of this work.

To the “*Amazing Pinoys*,” thank you so much for always being there.

Above all, I give thanks to **Almighty God**, whose grace, guidance, and blessings have carried me through this entire journey. Without Him, none of this would have been possible.

### Disclaimer

As a note of the term used throughout this book, the term “queer” is used to refer to people who identify themselves as part of the LGBTQ + community. Instead of the term “LGBTQ+,” which is not inclusive enough to capture and include all gender-diverse individuals (teachers) who identify outside of the male–female gender binary the term “queer” is preferred for its inclusivity.

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is a product of my three-year ethnographic research on queer language teachers' identity and agency conducted in Thailand, focusing on how queer language teachers promote gender-inclusive pedagogy and navigate their professional identities while engaged in language education in the country. Within these three years, I conducted in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions with queer language teachers, which has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their work and how they maintain their identities within their classrooms.

This book is divided into two parts, with four chapters in each part offering both theoretical insights and practical discussions on the topics of teacher agency and queer language pedagogy. In addition, each chapter opens with some key concepts that are important to each chapter and concludes with practical classroom activities with discussion questions and research suggestions, encouraging readers to engage critically with the material and explore further avenues of inquiry.

### Part One: Theoretical and Conceptual Backgrounds

The first part of the book sets the foundational tone, providing readers with the necessary theoretical and conceptual frameworks to understand the discussions that follow. Each chapter presents concepts that are necessary for our understanding of queer language teacher agency. It also emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs of marginalized students and teachers and other queer individuals in the context of language education.

- *Chapter 1* explores the concepts of inclusion and equality in education, with a specific emphasis on gender equality and equity. It highlights the necessity of not just creating a gender-inclusive educational environment that values all students but also of the big role that language teachers play in making the classroom environment safe and inclusive through their agency.
- *Chapter 2* introduces and defines key concepts that are central to the book, including teacher agency, queer pedagogy, and social justice. These concepts

are critical for understanding the dynamics at play in the classrooms of queer language teachers.

- *Chapter 3* discusses the concept of teacher agency for social justice, presenting various theoretical perspectives on how agency is understood and enacted in educational settings. It also discusses the specific challenges and opportunities that arise for teacher agency within the context of language teaching.
- *Chapter 4* examines queer teachers' educational experiences, highlighting their struggles to define their teaching identities and run language classrooms. It discusses how societal and institutional heteronormative norms marginalize queer teachers, making them disadvantaged in education.

#### Part Two: Study Findings on Teacher Agency in Queer Language Pedagogy

The second part of the book is dedicated to presenting the findings from a study I conducted on teacher agency in queer language pedagogy in Thailand. This section is rich with interview excerpts, classroom observation transcripts, and discussions, offering an in-depth look at the lived experiences of queer language teachers in Thai educational institutions.

Considering the ethical standards for conducting my study, I had participants in the individual interviews and classroom observation signed a consent form that informed them about the purpose of the study. I also explained that the shared data would remain confidential, and only I would have access to it, ensuring the data would be kept safe until the study's completion. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity in the data presentation and publication, I allowed them to choose pseudonyms.

Additionally, I asked participants about their availability and convenience for follow-up interviews and classroom observation. I also reminded them that since their participation was voluntary, they could opt out of the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable with the research process.

- *Chapter 5* addresses the question, *What perceptions do queer language teachers have with regard to their teacher agency in language pedagogy?* It explores how these teachers perceive their agency as an expression of their identity, which is closely linked to their decision-making processes in the curriculum, teaching flexibility, and the prioritization of inclusivity in the classroom. It also discusses that agency is not just about professional autonomy but is also an embodiment of their queer identity, influencing their approach to language teaching and their efforts to implement gender-inclusive practices.

- *Chapter 6* answers the question, *How does being a queer language teacher shape how they make decisions and design their language curriculum?* It examines how the queer identities of the teachers shape their pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. It also explores the ways in which their queer identity informs their approach to curriculum design, emphasizing the integration of queer perspectives and inclusivity in their language teaching.
- *Chapter 7* focuses on the question, *How do queer language teachers exercise their authority and autonomy to make their language teaching practices gender-inclusive?* It explores the ways in which these teachers exercise their agency to promote queer language pedagogy. It also discusses how their authority and autonomy in the classroom allow them to challenge heteronormative practices and create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.
- *Chapter 8* discusses how queer language teachers perceive their teacher agency as deeply intertwined with their identity and the cultural and educational context in which they teach. Unlike studies in other contexts, which have reported difficulties for queer teachers in expressing their gender identity due to pervasive heteronormativity, this chapter highlights that queer language teachers in Thailand experience a significant degree of freedom in expressing their identity. This freedom, in turn, empowers them to enact their teacher agency effectively, promoting queer language pedagogy both within the classroom and in the broader Thai academic community. In addition, this chapter also offers implications for language pedagogy, particularly in contexts where queer identities are visible and celebrated. It concludes with recommendations for educators and policy-makers on how to support and enhance the agency of queer language teachers in promoting inclusive educational practices.

This page intentionally left blank

## Part One

# THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUNDS

This page intentionally left blank

# INCLUSION, EQUALITY, AND TEACHER AGENCY IN EDUCATION

*These heteronormative practices not only exclude and silence students who are gender nonconforming and transgender but also deny the rights of these students to have equitable and respectful access to quality education. (Ulla & Paiz, 2024, p. 5)*

## ABSTRACT

*Inclusion and equality in education are essential for promoting diversity, recognition, and participation in the classroom. Inclusive education should ensure that all students receive the assistance, acknowledgment, and recognition they need to succeed in their academic journey. However, despite numerous research advancements and pedagogical developments, there is still a pressing need to further discuss and define what constitutes an inclusive learning environment, given the broad nature of the term “inclusive education.” This chapter explores the concepts of inclusion and equality in education, with an emphasis on gender equality and equity. I highlight the importance of addressing the needs of marginalized students, with a specific focus on queer students, that is, students who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. I also discuss that central to addressing the needs of these students are the teachers, who play a big role in making the classroom environment safe and inclusive through their agency. Such a discussion aims to provide a clear framework for gender-inclusive education, ensuring that all students – regardless of economic status, ability, race, gender, nationality, and color – are valued and included in the classroom.*

*Keywords:* Diversity; gender equality; inclusive education; queer students; teacher agency

## INCLUSION AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

No less than Qian Tang himself, the Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO, in his Foreword in the book “A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education,” felt compelled to acknowledge that promoting diversity, inclusion, and participation in the classroom, where learners are provided with an equal chance for academic progress, is still a challenge faced by almost all education institutions in the world. Such a challenge is evident as millions of children are unable to attend formal education in economically developing nations, while many young people drop out of school in developed nations (Ainscow, 2020). Tang (2017) recognized that despite numerous pedagogical developments and educational advancements, there is a need for more school efforts to provide all learners with an inclusive learning environment and experience where equality and equity are emphasized. This call to action suggests that educational institutions should go beyond making superficial changes and instead deeply integrate practices that accommodate the diverse needs of all students. This will ensure that every learner not only has equal opportunities but also the support that is necessary to succeed on an equitable basis.

But how do we define inclusion and equality in education? In many educational contexts, although inclusive education continues to be perceived as an approach to accommodating students with disabilities in schools, there is a growing recognition that inclusive education should have a broader scope to include not only students with disabilities but also the promotion and acceptance of diversity among all learners engaged in the process of learning (Ainscow, 2020), regardless of their economic status, ability, race, gender, nationality, and color. In other studies, the idea of inclusion, equality, and equity may often be practiced or explored with students who have learning disabilities, are multilingual, and are migrants or refugees (see Asamoah et al., 2018; Baak, 2019; Gitschthaler et al., 2021). Most of these studies highlighted the need for an inclusive teaching environment, practice, and understanding toward students who are often marginalized due to their race, gender, nationality, and color. Specifically, the studies by Asamoah et al. (2018), Baak (2019), and Gitschthaler et al. (2021) provide a closer look at the complexities of inclusive education across different contexts – Ghana, Australia, and

Austria. Each study highlights the critical role of not just curriculum design but also the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and students in achieving true inclusivity in education.

[Asamoah et al. \(2018\)](#) examine inclusive education in Ghana, focusing on how it is perceived by visually impaired students, their nonimpaired peers, and teachers. The study reveals a dichotomy in attitudes: visually impaired students and some teachers support inclusive education, recognizing its potential to bridge the prejudice gap and affirm the capability of visually impaired students to achieve academic success. However, students without impairments display a negative attitude toward inclusive education, suggesting that merely implementing inclusive policies is insufficient if the broader school community does not support them.

[Baak \(2019\)](#) shifts the focus to Australia, where the study explores the educational experiences of South Sudanese students. The research uncovers significant challenges these students face, including racism, discrimination, and a lack of cultural understanding from both peers and teachers. These findings indicate that integrating students from diverse backgrounds into mainstream classrooms does not automatically result in an inclusive environment. Instead, systemic issues like racism and inadequate cultural competency among teachers must be addressed to have genuine inclusivity.

[Gitschthaler et al. \(2021\)](#) add another dimension by investigating the perspectives of Austrian teachers on language support for multilingual students. The study finds that while teachers generally favor inclusive language support approaches, they also report low self-efficacy in adapting their teaching methods to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity. This lack of confidence is linked to insufficient training, suggesting that professional development is crucial for teachers to support multilingual students and have an inclusive classroom environment effectively.

From these studies, it becomes clear that achieving inclusivity in education is a complex challenge that goes beyond curriculum adjustments. We can argue that true inclusion requires a holistic approach that considers the attitudes, behaviors, and self-efficacy of both teachers and students. As presented in all three contexts, these studies highlight that while inclusive policies may be in place, their success depends on how well they are crafted, designed, and implemented with support, of course, from the educational community.

Consequently, given the role played by teachers, they are indeed pivotal in this process, as they are the ones who can exercise true inclusivity in the context of their own classrooms. Their support for inclusive education, as seen in Ghana ([Asamoah et al., 2018](#)) and Australia ([Baak, 2019](#)), is crucial, but it must be coupled with the resources and training needed to implement inclusive

practices. Without this support, as seen in Australia (Baak, 2019), teachers may struggle to adapt their methods, leading to a less effective learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the experiences of students, particularly those from marginalized or minority groups, must be at the forefront of discussions on inclusivity. As seen in Australia, the challenges faced by South Sudanese students highlight the need for a more culturally responsive education system that actively addresses issues like racism and discrimination.

However, the call for inclusive education is not only to recognize and acknowledge learners who may be marginalized in the teaching and learning process because of their social and economic status. Beyond inclusion, the need for equality and equity should also be considered. This is because inclusive education would be nothing if teaching and learning practices do not align with what inclusive education really is. Therefore, inclusive education should be a prerequisite for equity, social justice, and equality in education (Shaeffer, 2019). Loreman (2017) recognized that to be inclusive, all educational institutions should become more receptive to children with a broad range of abilities, ethnicities, genders, and religions, as well as other situations and difficulties that occur in the classroom. One way to be inclusive is to employ inclusive pedagogical approaches so that all learners are not only recognized but also treated equally in the learning process. As suggested by Loreman (2017), these approaches may include universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and the inclusive pedagogical approach in action framework.

To further promote quality inclusive education, where there is equality in the teaching and learning process, the United Nations (UN), in its development program, established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which pertains to education, to tackle the most urgent global challenges the education sector faces. SDG 4, which is focused on attaining excellent education, advocates for providing inclusive and equitable quality education as well as lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals by the year 2030. One of the primary aims of this initiative is to address gender inequities and promote equitable opportunities for education and vocational training at all levels, with a particular focus on vulnerable student populations, including those who identify as queer. Furthermore, SDG 4 underscores the significance of inclusion and equity as fundamental pillars for establishing high-quality education and learning. It also emphasizes the need to construct and enhance educational infrastructures that consider the needs of children, those with disabilities, and different genders. It also advocates for providing secure, nonviolent, inclusive, and efficient learning settings that cater to all individuals

(Tang, 2017). While the United Nations (UN) aligns with the government's education policies aimed at achieving SDG 4, which focuses on providing equal learning opportunities for all learners, it remains the collective duty of the government, educational institutions, and education professionals to uphold and adhere to principles of inclusion, equality, and equity within the education system.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that achieving inclusivity in education requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both structural and attitudinal barriers. Educational institutions must not only design curricula that accommodate diverse student needs but also promote an environment where all students feel respected and valued. This involves providing teachers with the necessary resources and training to support diverse learners, as well as promoting a school culture that genuinely embraces inclusivity.

## GENDER-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

As argued by Ainscow (2020), “inclusive education” may have been used mainly to refer to an inclusive approach for students with disabilities. However, it is also important to note that other educational contexts may have used the term broadly, impacting how others perceived and understood it. For some, inclusive education may refer to the notion of inclusion among ethnic minority students and multilingual speakers, but beyond that, inclusive education promotes the participation of all students in the learning contexts. Loreman (2017) acknowledged:

*Inclusive education is a contested concept, with the underlying practices and meanings varying from region to region. In order to discern what inclusive education is, it is necessary to consider local conceptualizations of childhood and children's rights, models, and structures of schooling, societal norms, and other regional conditions. (p. 1)*

Loreman (2017) argued that one way to understand inclusion is to consider exclusion by removing the factors that limit the participation of the students. Thus, considering the diversity of the students within any educational institution, Ainscow (2020) also emphasized the importance of equity as it implies fairness for all students. Ainscow (2020) further mentioned that inclusive education aims “to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and

ability, and that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. Hence, the emphasis on equity implies a concern with fairness” (p. 9). It should be noted that the goal of inclusive education is to establish a learning environment where each student feels appreciated and has an equal chance to participate in the learning process. Since it is acknowledged that education is a fundamental human right and that creating a more equitable society depends on it, inclusive education should, therefore, emphasize equality, highlight the significance of justice, and guarantee that all students, irrespective of their circumstances or background, receive the assistance, acknowledgment, and recognition they require to succeed. This emphasis on justice is essential to developing an educational system that actively seeks to remove obstacles to inclusion in addition to accommodating diversity in education.

While many studies have addressed inclusive education from the perspectives of students with learning disabilities, multilingual, and migrants or refugees, attention must also be given to other students, especially those who identify themselves outside of the gender binary spectrum of male and female. Since diversity is an important concept in education, the call for inclusivity in teaching and learning should also be addressed, particularly to queer students, who are often ignored and disengaged in the classroom (Evans et al., 2017) due to the influence of heteronormative culture and the absence or lack of education policies that consider the participation of these students (Allen et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2017). For instance, in their study, Evans et al. (2017) explored the experiences of discrimination and isolation among 12 self-identified queer students at a public state research-oriented university in the United States to understand better their perspectives of the campus atmosphere. Using interviews, the study showed that many queer students reported feeling alone or discriminated against on campus and experienced emotional and social isolation, which affected their capacity to think clearly and participate in many parts of their college experience.

Queer students, as mentioned earlier, are the ones who always face marginalization and discrimination within educational institutions. As a result, they always feel isolated or that they isolate themselves from people around them who may have a biased judgment toward them. Such a feeling of isolation is valid among these students, considering that they may not want to associate themselves with other students who may just ignore and alienate them from school activities. In addition, they may feel rejected on campus and receive hateful and negative comments from their peers as regards their identity (Fields & Wotipka, 2020).