

Queer voices in the pedagogical spaces towards inclusivity: Overcoming the binary linguistic standards in education

¹Nikky S. Garo, ²Gerard Louiez P. Mapalo I, ³Samantha B. Cancino, ³Samantha S. Duco, ³Tertius Breindel C. Portabes, ³Shawn Michael P. Pajinag & ³Marjorie B. Marquez

Abstract

This research critically examines the operation of the binary linguistic standards in philosophy tertiary education, using queer theory as a deconstructive lens. Employing collaborative autoethnography (CAE), this study explores the lived experiences and narratives of queer philosophy educators and students, underscoring the subjective experience as a vital source of insight. This approach aligns with queer theory (queering), allowing for the deconstruction of macro- and microlevel heteronormativity within the university and classroom contexts, revealing how students' daily encounters expose the fragility and constructiveness of these binary standards. The research reveals how students and educators in Catholic institutions navigate and negotiate daily encounters, calling for a critical re-evaluation of knowledge production. By centering marginalized voices, this study aims to disrupt established epistemologies. This study's focus on queer philosophy educators and students may limit its generalizability. However, its findings have implications for rethinking pedagogical norms and knowledge production in tertiary education, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and diversity.

Keywords: *queer voices, queer theory, language and pedagogy, philosophy, inclusivity*

Article History:

Received: July 25, 2025
Accepted: August 28, 2025

Revised: August 21, 2025
Published online: September 9, 2025

Suggested Citation:

Garo, N.S., Mapalo I, G.L.P., Cancino, S.B., Duco, S.S., Portabes, T.B.C., Pajinag, S.M.P. & Marquez, M.B. (2025). Queer voices in the pedagogical spaces towards inclusivity: Overcoming the binary linguistic standards in education. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 5(3), 247-269. <https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353264>

About the authors:

¹Corresponding author. Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy (candidate), Associate Professor at Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines. Email: nsgaro@slu.edu.ph

²Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. Part-time faculty at Department of Religion, Saint Louis University, Baguio City Philippines. Email: glpmapalo@slu.edu.ph

³Undergraduate Student of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Saint Louis University, Baguio City Philippines.



1. Introduction

Pedagogical spaces are environments where teaching and learning unfold. They are not merely sites of intellectual exchange but also imbued with social, political, and cultural meanings. These pedagogical spaces operate at both macro and micro levels: the micro level involves academics engaging with students and reflecting on their practices within departmental contexts, whereas the macro level encompasses national and international policies, regulations, and frameworks that influence these spaces, highlighting the importance of acknowledging sectoral and disciplinary differences (Fanghanel et al., 2016).

Pedagogical spaces, while ostensibly committed to openness and critical inquiry, remain embedded in linguistic and conceptual norms that are gendered and heteronormative. Particularly in philosophy, these spaces privilege binary categories over fluid identities and abstraction over embodied experience. Philosophy ought to be fluid, reflective of multiple truths and lived realities. However, it is frequently constrained by masculinist traditions and language that render queer voices unintelligible. As Butler (2006) quotes Spelman (1988), “the cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism,” which shape canonical texts and their demonstrations in the classroom.

Language’s role extends beyond a facet of human society; it is the shaping force of how people think, learn, and constitute realities (Wittgenstein, 1953). Education, by extension, is structured by language. Language becomes the medium through which students and teachers create and express themselves. Butler (2006) proposed that language becomes a performative force that amplifies agency and subjectivity through repeated discourse. In pedagogical spaces, it helps students and teachers disrupt and resist heteronormative standards that restraint them. However, when language conforms to heteronormative standards, the expressive potential of pedagogical spaces is distorted (Britzman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998). Instead of becoming a space for students and educators to embrace fluidity and self-expression, its spaces become restrictive in that only normative identities are rendered intelligible (Butler, 2006). Language becomes alienating and exclusionary when one does not follow the cultural and social norms within dominant educational discourse (Butler, 2006). Britzman (1995) calls attention to critically examining the role of language and our approaches in light of its capacity to become inclusive or reinforce marginalizing normative.

This paper explores how queer voices, specifically philosophy students and educators, navigate these pedagogical spaces toward inclusivity, challenging the binary linguistic structures that dominate educational discourse. The focus on queer theory, rather than queer feminism or activism, positions this work within a critical epistemological tradition that interrogates how language, identity, and performativity intersect in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, queer theory allows us to view gender and identity not as fixed essences but as iterative acts within a regulatory framework. By rejecting the notion of reason as a static, fixed philosophical concept, a queer-inclusive approach to it should view reason as a complex and evolving process that considers the perspectives of multiple identities (Apolo et al., 2025). This lens is valuable in understanding how queer individuals resist and reconfigure normative expectations embedded within the language of education.

In approaching the problems presented, particularly of the marginalization of queer voices in philosophy education in the Philippines, this paper examines the patriarchal curriculum and masculine-centered traditions that have historically minimized or excluded them; as such, this paper also addresses the gap in existing scholarship on how language in philosophy classrooms reproduces heteronormative norms, and limits queer intelligibility and epistemic validity. In providing ample foundation for this discussion, the researchers assert that the central thesis of this paper is that binary linguistic norms in philosophy education perpetuate heteronormativity, and that queer voices challenge and reframe these norms through lived experience and resistance. For the purposes of this study, this paper is divided into three main objectives: a) to investigate how queer voices negotiate heteronormative pedagogical environments, b) to analyze how language functions simultaneously as a site of exclusion and resistance in philosophy classrooms, and c) to explore how queering language and pedagogical practices can create more inclusive and transformative educational spaces.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gendered Philosophy Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Philippines

Philosophy education in the Philippines holds tradition in high regard, adhering to a historical curriculum that tends to overlook women philosophers (Opiniano et al., 2024). This established norm within the discipline has led to the emergence of heteronormative biases and disparities among students and educators in Philosophy. Consequently, as discussed by Apolo

et al. (2025), this study reflects on the limited attention given to how traditional classroom language shapes gender identities and marginalizes queer experiences.

In the context of the Philippines, gendered philosophy curriculum and pedagogy take on specific cultural and institutional dimensions as discussed by Opiniano et al. (2024) vis-à-vis the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 26, Series of 2017, Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy Programs. Their group focused on course features, including its sample curriculum and syllabi for selected courses as prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education, and the relevance of ethics as a general education subject. Despite GAD advocacy encouraging gender-sensitive education, the traditional trajectory of the BA philosophy program based on the curriculum and syllabus leans more toward male philosophers, pushing female and queer philosophers further to the margins.

Apolo et al. (2025) noted that if teaching strategies were governed by the use of norms rooted in traditional patriarchal thinking, it creates a toxic environment that breeds domination and further amplifies the privileges of male-dominated fields like philosophy. That is, when queer voices are marginalized, not only their presence, but also their modes and locus of learning are denied. Such circumstance also re-echoes the challenges faced by women education leaders in higher education in Namibia, where exclusion from networks, lack of institutional support, and male-dominated cultures are products of the systemic barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership roles (Ndakolonkoshi et al., 2025).

2.2. Queering Philosophy and Transforming Pedagogical Spaces

By foregrounding the experiences of queer philosophy students and educators, this paper aims to map how they negotiate, resist, and transform these pedagogical spaces. Through collaborative autoethnography and queer methodology, this research focuses on lived experience as both epistemological resource and site of critique. As a method that weaves together personal and reflective narratives, collaborative autoethnography offers a way to situate queer voices within broader institutional and discursive structures. Queer methodology interrogates normativity, enabling a reading of these voices not as marginal anecdotes but contextual analysis.

This rethinking calls for curricular reforms and radical engagement with the language of instruction. Queer theory allows us to see how identities are constituted through discourse,

and how these discourses can be reshaped to allow greater inclusivity. As Butler (2006) famously argued, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. In this sense, the language used in pedagogical spaces does not simply reflect reality; it constitutes it.

This paper takes up the task of challenging the binary linguistic structures of pedagogical spaces from a queer theoretical perspective, asking: How do queer voices navigate through heteronormative pedagogical spaces? Ultimately, this inquiry is not merely about representation or policy change but educational and epistemic justice. The inclusion of queer voices in philosophy is not a matter of accommodating difference, but of reconfiguring the system of philosophical engagement. It is in this spirit that this paper proceeds, not to offer closure, but to invite fluidity, resistance to oppressing systems, and the radical potential of queer pedagogy.

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory, Language, and Education

Queer theory has become a theoretical lens through which to address this dilemma. Through the continued interrogation of the constructs of gender and identity, it analyzes how language can either reinforce or challenge heteronormativity. It is a transformative approach that sheds light on the mechanism of how norms continue to be restricted through language and reimagines language as a site for fluidity and resistance. Ulla (2025) demonstrated that queer language teachers play a significant role in reshaping classroom discourse by fostering queer identity in positive classroom relationships, advocating for inclusivity, facilitating cultural understanding and challenging heteronormative teaching practices. Teacher agency becomes a way for queer teachers to express their identity, make curriculum decisions, and exercise flexibility in language teaching, prioritize inclusivity in the classroom, and implement gender-inclusive teaching practices. For the students, Rupp and Taylor (2024) discovered that exposure to college courses such as queer theory disrupts rigid binary systems and plays a significant role in enabling non heterosexual female college students to embrace their queerness and sexual fluidity. These studies collectively demonstrate Queer theory's transformative potential in pedagogical spaces through language as both a medium and site for fluidity and challenging heteronormative standards.

2.4. Pedagogical Spaces: The Macro and Micro Levels in Education

Distinguishing between macro and micro pedagogical spaces helps clarify how institutional ideology and design patterns affect classroom interactions. The macro level refers to curricular structures within the institution. For example, in the BA Philosophy curriculum broader normative standards and ideologies are embedded. The micro level involves the lived experiences of participants, including classroom methods implemented from the prescribed curriculum and individual interactions between learners and educators.

Pinar (1998), in his anthology, reveals how macro-level institutional designs often reproduce heteronormative biases and norms, whereas the micro level involving classroom dynamics becomes a space where such norms can be perpetuated, reimagined, or resisted. Using macro and micro level analysis, informed by queer theory and collaborative autoethnography, this paper aims to shed light on pervasive heteronormative structures within institutions. The perspectives of participants offer a more diverse understanding of the absence of queer and fluid ideologies in a predominantly heteronormative academic space.

2.5. Research Gap

Despite the increasing scholarly attention to gender and inclusivity in education, there remains a critical lack of research exploring how binary linguistic and heteronormative standards are perpetuated within tertiary philosophy education, particularly in education. While the literature highlights the structural biases in curricula and pedagogy, few studies have examined how language in philosophy classrooms actively constructs and regulates gendered subjectivities. Moreover, dominant research paradigms often marginalize or overlook the lived experiences of queer students and educators, reinforcing the very epistemic exclusions they aim to critique. This study addresses this gap by employing queer theory and collaborative autoethnography to foreground the voices of queer individuals in philosophy, providing a situated and reflexive critique of how heteronormativity manifests through pedagogical language and practice at both the macro (institutional) and micro (classroom) levels. In doing so, it challenges conventional philosophical discourse and seeks to reconceptualize inclusivity not merely as representation but also as a fundamental rethinking of knowledge production and transmission.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a Collaborative Autobiographical Ethnography (CAE), which is a qualitative research design. This method enables all seven authors to be able to engage in critical self-reflection, and shared analysis and personal experiences under broader sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts (Lapadat, 2017). As noted by Roy and Uekusa (2020), CAE fosters a collective process of meaning-making and serves to be a powerful tool in centering marginalized voices through nuanced storytelling and interpretation. Following the CAE framework as outlined by Chang et al. (2013), the research team proceeded with the five steps as follows: forming a research team, deciding on a research focus for the research team, selecting a collaboration model for the team, defining roles and setting boundaries for each participant, and considering ethical principles for the team. As such, the research team of Philosophy students and teachers simultaneously serve as both participants and authors of the aforementioned study, sourcing from their own lived experiences of navigating manifestations of binary, heteronormative norms in linguistic application and in educational settings.

3.2. Participants of the Study

The research team formed in three phases. First, a faculty-guided group of interested and capable undergraduate and postgraduate students was assembled. Preliminary meetings followed to assess compatibility and potential contributions, culminating in the finalization of a team composed of members with queer backgrounds and a shared commitment to collaborative research. The team initially explored Jose Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification in the context of OnlyFans but shifted focus owing to limited access to data. Instead, they grounded the research in their own experiences within the University, leading to the development of the study titled *Queer Voices in Pedagogical Spaces toward Inclusivity: Overcoming the Binary Linguistic Standards in Education*.

Motivated by the contrast between institutional policies and the lived realities of queer students, the team adopted CAE as the primary methodology. The team addressed ethical risks around identity exposure. Informed consent was obtained, with meetings ensuring voluntary participation. With these foundations, the team formally began the research.

3.3. Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process

The authors formulated a set of questions designed to help them explore diverse perspectives of philosophy educators and students regarding heteronormative issues within both institutional and classroom contexts, ranging from macro to micro levels. This includes an examination of the language used in institutional policies and activities as well as the shared experiences within classroom settings.

These questions aim to identify institutional policies, activities, and experiences that reflect or reinforce heteronormativity, potentially contributing to micro-level issues within classroom settings and among individual students. They serve as a foundation for understanding broader, macro-level concerns and help trace the root causes of more localized, personal challenges.

3.4. Data Analysis

This paper's data collection began with the authors' reflections, which served as an entry point to examine broader patterns and challenges within academic spaces. These insights were deepened through conversations and reflections with fellow queer authors, whose diverse experiences in philosophy courses revealed forms of silencing, discomfort, and subtle resistance. Rather than treating these narratives as isolated accounts, the study wove them into a collective voice calling for institutional change. To ensure the validity of the theories, the authors applied a systematic coding process to highlight relevant phrases and statements. By collecting themes from these codes, and capturing response patterns related to the research questions.

3.5. Research Ethics

The authors obtained the necessary approvals and permissions from relevant authorities, secured and signed the Attestation for Ethical Consideration and ensured that ethical standards were followed throughout the research's completion. The participants participated voluntarily, and their informed consent was obtained prior to the collection of data, ensuring that they were aware of the research purpose, procedures, and potential risks or benefits, and that their participation would cause no harm or undue distress.

Authenticity. In embodying the Queer Voices, the authors capture their personal narratives, experiences, and collaborative reflection. To maintain the authenticity of the data,

the authors maintain honesty and integrity in the data they input. Authors carefully recount true events, avoid fabrication, and maintain critical interpretations accordingly (Lincoln & Egon, 1985).

Accuracy and credibility. To establish methodological rigor, the researchers employed various strategies to observe and manage potential biases, ensuring the reliability of the data and its analysis. They maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by acknowledging their positionality as philosophy scholars, students, and educators, and considering its potential impact on the analysis. The authors actively draw from the experiences of others, including their peers. They represent their own experiences and those of others as they are, avoiding alterations and vague wording to align with the study's goal. To maintain credibility, the authors avoid prejudice in their selection, ensuring they do not only choose narratives that strengthen the study; they include all queer voices connected to the factors being explored to mitigate bias (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018).

Confidentiality. From a first-hand perspective, the authors, as primary participants, accept that the contents of the study could be traced back to them. However, the authors recognize that this is not the same case for the related persons in their narratives. There is also the matter of second-hand perspectives such as the personal narratives of others. To maintain confidentiality, the authors use pseudonyms and avoid revealing sensitive information that can be traced back to other persons involved (Guillemin et al., 2004).

Informed consent. The authors, as the primary participants, consented to share their personal narratives, lived experiences, and collaborative discussions. To ensure informed consent, the authors are transparent to each other in how they handle the data given (University of Oxford, Research Support, 2018.). Furthermore, the authors ensure that they are not forced and are psychologically and physically capable of providing consent.

Respect for intellectual property. The authors respect the use of relevant literature throughout the making of the study. All sources that are used in the study to enhance, provide background, or generally aid the study are duly cited. The researchers faithfully represent the information through careful extraction and paraphrasing to ensure that the sources are not distorted. The authors also acknowledge the contributions of the authors of the literature and therefore give credit accordingly (University of Cambridge, 2025).

4. Findings

The findings highlight important points from the participants' reflections targeting specific issues seen at both the macro and micro levels, encompassing institutional and classroom contexts. By integrating philosophy educators' and students' lived experiences with contextual factors, the findings demonstrate how individual stories intersect with broader cultural and organizational frameworks (Ellis et al., 2011; Carpenter & Suto, 2008).

Reflection 1: Navigating Queer Expression Within Conservative Institutional Norms

Conservative institutional norms often compel queer students to conform to the seemingly accepted dress code to primarily avoid being judged by peers and the faculty, and to prevent reprimands from the administration for expressing fluidity in their choices of clothing (e.g. cross dressing) albeit done modestly and still in accordance with the policy guidelines. Moreover, despite the university's efforts for inclusion during Pride month, some students still see these gestures as merely performative due to the institution's lack of support throughout the rest of the academic year. Support for queer movements and fluid ideologies should be consistent, not seasonal.

"The need for me to conform in terms of dressing myself is not due to avoidance of being judged, but primarily to fit in with the irrational implementation of the dress code policy." Participant 1

Support for LGBTQ+ students is often reduced to symbolic gestures: rainbow-themed events in June, a social media post during Pride Month that rarely extends to sustained, year-round advocacy or structural change." Participant 2

Reflection 2: Reclaiming Space in Philosophical Discourse

The Philosophy program and its curriculum remain heavily Eurocentric and heteronormative. The evident lack of queer ideologies and materials during classroom discussions often reduces queer and feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, and other philosophers to mere supplementary figures. This gap in the philosophy syllabi puts queer students at the margins of the class unless they actively insert themselves in the conversation.

"I can only remember a few women philosophers we studied in the program, and they were only discussed once in the entire curriculum. Looking back and thinking

about these things made me realize that the philosophy program at the university is essentially heteronormative.” Participant 6

“Overcoming heteronormativity means insisting that feminist thinkers are foundational for building hybrid identities that refuse to separate philosophy from lived experience. This separation reinforces the idea that queer identity is not philosophical and that hybridity dilutes rigor.” Participant 3

Reflection 3: Language, Autonomy, and Identity

Due to the pervasive heteronormativity present not only in institutional norms but also within the classroom setting, queer students often feel the need to conform and modify how they act, dress, and present themselves in order to fit according to the standards. This pressure to explain themselves and their identities has become a prerequisite before the majority acknowledges them and their ideas. The current environment where microaggressions happen casually towards students who do not necessarily fit into the heteronormative expectations, pushes queer students to either conform or work twice as hard as the majority in order to compensate for the socially constructed disadvantage of being fluid.

“I have felt pressure to perform a ‘neutral’ version of myself. Sharing insights from queer theory or personal experience can feel like stepping into a battlefield. It’s emotionally taxing to explain your humanity before you can even begin to explore ideas.” Participant 3

“My body language is probably something I have consciously tried to modify.... I often try to act more consciously with the male stereotype... There is a particular struggle between how I want to present myself and how I present myself; sometimes, I feel in conflict with my identity.” Participant 4

“To me, being “queer” sooner precedes my identity as a philosophy student, as much as being a “woman” precedes my humanity; this does not always necessarily manifest negatively but still testifies to how I choose to be treated within academic spaces that are noticeably and undeniable still engulfed in Eurocentric, binary, and paternalistic patterns... Inside, there is fear inherent and inseparable from my conception—that I may be diminished in a field such as philosophy that still tends to traditional discourse and explores concepts functionally and politically-obsolete.” Participant 5

Reflection 4: Between Language and Identity

Language has a complex role in shaping identity and academic experience. The designated materials in the philosophy syllabi oftentimes use intricate and archaic language,

translation of primary texts also needs contextual understanding, and thus the language used in texts and lectures proves to be a double-edged sword: it can either discourage engagement or compel students to persist and adapt to the complexities and develop new ways of understanding. Beyond formal academics, language functions as a medium of self-expression. Within the heteronormative context, an individual's choice of language can feel either constraining or liberating.

"Language then as I become a constrained and mindful endeavor verging on the vague and embracing queering as self-reflective and freeing...The use of "they/them" pronouns, for example, no longer incites questioning, gossip, or raised eyebrows but rather is seen as an act of allyship externally but as a means of letting a bit of my authentic self be expressed without becoming a spectacle."

Participant 5

"Languages used in instruction (both textual and verbal) are diverse and challenging. Sometimes, the intricacies and technicalities of language in philosophy compel you to either stop reading or overcome difficulties and look for better ways to understand the subject matter." Participant 6

Reflection 5: Between Doctrine and Dialogue

The institution's Catholic identity emphasizes binary identities and heterosexual norms. This attitude creates a cautious environment for instructors, thus resulting in the avoidance of open discussion of queer perspectives for the fear of contradicting the institution's doctrine. This hesitation leads to a silence that subtly excludes certain voices, affecting both the curriculum and classroom culture.

"The cultural and religious backdrop of the institution contributes to a climate where the topic of queer identities is either cautiously approached or left unaddressed. The silence becomes a form of exclusion, especially with respect to curriculum design or open discussions. Instructors, students, and staff often internalize this silence, assuming that certain topics are off-limits simply because they are sensitive in the eyes of tradition." Participant 7

5. Discussion

5.1. The Queer Voices

The following analysis is derived primarily from the reflection narratives of the participants of this research study. The reflection narratives show that the authors themselves

have a different way of overcoming the challenges as they navigate through the rigor of their academic and work challenges found at either the macro or micro levels. To use Jennifer Terry's (1991) definition in the article titled *Underdogs: Social Deviance and Queer Theory* by Heather Love, Queer voices refer to the individuals who came to speak their voices and thereby developed '*deviant subjectivities*' (Hoogland, 2023). These deviant subjectivities, inspired by queer theory, reecho Smith's (2020) and Sedgwick's (1993), propositions strongly argued that the queering position has 'no fixed referent' and should remain an open and 'ever-shifting' intellectual endeavor and must be understood as an 'open mesh of possibilities' (Lesutis, 2023). The queer voice's primary concern, therefore, is "to create a difference, to make these voices visible by challenging and calling the normative impulses and social structures into question, and to create a never-fully knowable texture of subjectivity, self, and social life" (Lesutis, 2023).

5.2. Queering in Silence: Navigating Through Casual Micro Aggressions

Meyer (2003) argued that under the concept of the Minority Stress Theory (MST), as cited in the works of Chaney and Mason (2024), the "LGBTQA+ community constantly experiences socially based stressors and discrimination because of living in a heterosexist and cissexist culture." Studies show that LGBTQ+ individuals face bullying, violence, and internalized heterosexism, which often lead to coping mechanisms like substance abuse or withdrawal. The participants in Reflection 3 learned to navigate and transform themselves to see beyond the superficial identities and labels that others imposed on them. Looking through the systemic dysfunction of the dominant gender norm roles, they started 'queering' using various strategies to overcome classroom microaggressions. In a radical inversion of Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, participant 5 asserts queerness is not defined by performing ascribed gender statements to identify within the spectrum. Often, autonomy in queer spaces is associated with 'coming out' as the ultimate liberation, an implicit expectation that every individual in the community finds salvation in defining oneself as queer; this expectation, however, is inflexible in its configuration, deeming the will of autonomy to extend only in one direction.

5.3. Longing for Epistemic Recognition

According to Yilmaz et al. (2021), LGBTQIA+ people are vulnerable, ignored populations that society tries to avoid in many communities. This fact, in turn, becomes the

inevitable cause of why the LGBTQIA+ community usually encounters difficulty in establishing a sense of belonging at home, at school, and at work; what more if the community where they work or are enrolled is a Christian institution? Participants 6 and 7 have seen firsthand the exclusionary features of pedagogical instructions (verbal and textual) and the discriminatory environment and behavior observed from coworkers and manifested with their students. In the academic environment, curriculum design plays a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of whose knowledge is valued and whose perspectives are marginalized.

This erasure and lack of queer expression, history, and perspectives leave a void of understanding necessary to claim that learning is holistic and thorough. This speaks toward an entire demographic of individuals seeking to establish themselves as valid contributors to the universal well of knowledge. As Participant 3 articulated in their reflection, it was stated that queer philosophy students will be able to overcome such erasure only as far as they "insert themselves" back into conversations and narratives wherein they have been erased or ignored. Participant 3's experience of being shut down by her peers after suggesting a diversion toward a queer feminist perspective during class discussion exemplifies Fricker's (2018) concept of testimonial violence, wherein one's credibility and perspective have been watered down owing to the nature of their identity.

In a phenomenological study on the life-journey of transwomen students, Origenes's (2022) findings mirror the aforementioned struggle for recognition, particularly emphasizing how educational settings tend to minimize or neglect their lived realities which further intensifies feelings of marginalization. In highlighting these testimonies of resilience, Origenes was able to pinpoint how the absence or denial of recognition does not merely signify the lack of inclusivity but rather a systematic attempt to silence transwomen and undermine their identity as well as their intellectual contributions. These accounts further affirm that the desire for epistemic recognition is not solely attributed nor limited to philosophy classroom settings but is also part of a broader trend of exclusionary practices levied against queer and trans students across multiple academic platforms.

As such, epistemic recognition is also tantamount to a simultaneous validation of one's identity and a distinct line in the sand that precludes holistic self-expression. The lack of linguistic tools in academic settings able to interpret and examine queer perspectives is telling in terms of how much the queer community's intellectual contributions are regarded as unnecessary or unintelligible. For each narrative, there is a distinct presence of longing for

epistemic recognition that persists. Although often defined as emotional, longing in context is fundamentally characterized as philosophical, particularly in an epistemological crisis.

5.4. Discerning Tolerance from Genuine Acceptance in Queer Spaces

The queer community endures within the broader context of heteronormative institutions only insofar as they do not challenge or destabilize the system in place. This is highlighted in the testimonies of Participants 1 and 2, albeit both address the dilemma at different levels within the macro sociopolitical field. With respect to the rigidity of dress code policies at the university, Participant 1's encounter with penalization for self-expression which does not conform to the degree of conservatism and is deemed 'appropriate' by an institution reveals an entryway to understanding gendered policing, with accounts of participants regarding a gender nonconforming individual similarly being penalized for not wearing clothes that adhere to their assumed sex. This also speaks to how gender-affirmative language or queering language is weaponized against the queer community; although policies were not written with malice against the LGBTQ+ community, this neutrality of language used benefits adherence to the binary since it does not accommodate nontraditional conceptions of gender expression and allows it be interpreted by officials who may or may not be inclined towards a cisgender iteration. As several participants noted, the university did make amendments to uniform and clothing policies to be more inclusive, but this was only possible through the interference of queer individuals in solidarity fighting to push past the thin veil of tolerance into wholesome acceptance. As Foucault (1977) observed, discourse constructs regimes of truth, shaping who is included or marginalized; in this case, tolerance masks exclusion.

In consideration of a micro-level examination of testimonials, the impact of veiled tolerance as opposed to acceptance requires the queer individual to be more cautious and engage in self-policing behavior and expression. Given that these institutions' "acceptance" is conditional, queer people are less inclined to vulnerability and authentic self-determination.

5.5. Transforming Challenges into Hope and Inclusivity

Foucault (1977) argues that institutional knowledge reproduces "regimes of truth" that determine legitimate knowledge, excluding perspectives that challenge dominant norms. Despite learners' efforts to explore outside curriculum-designated texts, the lack of institutional support and structural change significantly limits perspective and reinforces an

exclusionary view. Challenging dominant heteronormative and binary standards, according to Scarpetta (2020), does not imply the creation of new ‘special rights’ for the queer community but extends the same rights to queer people as those enjoyed by everyone else. The road to inclusion is not over the rainbow. However, universities are trying to promote inclusive policies that support gender-sensitive and safe spaces at both macro and micro levels. Thus, the promotion of queer pedagogy seeks to challenge these assumptions embedded in educational systems. It questions the presumed neutrality of curriculum content and teaching practices, advocating for learning environments that embrace discomfort, fluidity, and difference (Britzman, 1995). Rather than treating knowledge as fixed or objective, queer pedagogy urges educators and learners to examine how institutions regulate identity, knowledge, and belonging through normative discourses (Luhmann, 1998). Participants 2 and 3 aim for that day when genuine inclusion is within reach. Efforts are made to make the curriculum gender sensitive and not exclusionary, where one can wear what one wants without fear of being scored or bullied, where teachers and fellow students will be abetting, not discriminating, and where textbooks and the language used in philosophical discussions are not homogeneous or gendered. These are the hopes that both participants desire to experience, a space where everything is dynamic, fluid, nonbinary, and ultimately, nondiscriminatory.

5.6. Language’s Epistemic Role

As Participant 5 establishes in her narrative, autonomy does not have to be achieved through a relentless fight for visibility but through subtle, strategic expressions. In her negotiation with identity through language, she recounts how referring to herself as a third person and using “they/them” pronouns in academic settings enables her to maintain distance and her ‘queerness’ as a quiet defiance against a system that abides by Eurocentric, heteronormative, paternalistic standards. In the same vein, these efforts to weaponize the vagueness of language to shield oneself from tokenization and invalidation of queer identity are also manifestation of agency. In terms of queering as a method of self-determination under institutionally enforced conformity (Apolo et al., 2025), the individual does not owe others, even those within their community, their ability towards nuanced self-expression. In this sense, autonomy goes both ways: as a rejection of convention, not only in traditionally conservative and normative settings but also within and against expectations set within the queer community

itself. Language, then, becomes the axis upon which autonomy turns, labeling oneself as queer serves as a platform for self-actualization but does not need to be externalized for validation.

Queer individuals, labeled activists, once believed the most significant expression of queering was to translate into language their silenced experiences of discrimination. However, in its proper understanding, queering is activism in silence, not to take up space in actual carnal proximity but rather in the internal space one creates in the mind. In this sense, true queering lies in the continuous, unspoken, instigation of the normative thoughts created within one's epistemic field. "Butler's primary value was to help [one] see [...] that there were cracks in the system. These openings could be used to introduce change—to allow [one] to believe that seeing men and women in every corner did not mean either that they were there or that [one] necessarily had to become one" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 139). It is about dismantling internalized heteronormativity, challenging preconceived notions, and forging a unique understanding of self that transcends societal expectations.

5.7. Language as Both a Reinforcer and Resistance through Queering

Language in educational contexts functions both as a reinforcement of tradition and a potential site of resistance; the narratives reveal this as language disciplines 'queerness' and how queering language can subvert pre-existing norms. Although language is a vehicle for being and thought, it is neither neutral nor impermeable to the biases that scaffold its creation. As it becomes the platform through which queerness is disciplined and subverted, claiming that language is neutral sets a dangerous precedent.

For example, Participant 6 identifies the predominance of male-authored philosophical texts in the curriculum, a quiet but persistent signal of which voices are deemed intellectually legitimate. This absence is not accidental, it is a purposeful linguistic and epistemological strategy that suggests queerness exists outside the realm of reason. As Wittgenstein (1953) posited, "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world," a principle that gains urgency when one's identity is excluded from the academic vernacular. When queer language is neither spoken nor heard, the subject becomes a victim of epistemic injustice rendered in the name of neutrality, which frames the binary as default, rendering queerness mute in spaces that claim to cultivate reason. Conversely, Participant 5 demonstrated how language can be reclaimed for queer self-determination. By speaking of her identity in the third person and using "they/them" pronouns, she performs what Ahmed (2017) calls a "willful orientation": rejecting institutional

demands for clarity, transparency, and coherence. These choices are not evasions but acts of deliberate opacity, asserting that queer presence need not contort itself to be palatable or legible to normative audiences. In the same gesture, she withholds full disclosure, treating her identity not as a pedagogical offering but as sovereign terrain.

On an ironically micro level, microaggressions, like those normalized in Participant 4's experience of casual queer jokes, serve as another form of linguistic reinforcement, reminders that queer subjectivity remains othered, humorous, or peripheral. These instances, often dismissed as trivial, enact what Fricker (2007) terms "testimonial injustice," where credibility is deflated by identity-based prejudice. Failure to recognize the weight of such language reasserts structural refusal to acknowledge queer pain, nuance, or interiority. Nevertheless, queer resistance emerges within these very constraints. Through subtle disruptions, shifting pronouns, evading direct self-reference, or bending academic tone, language is queered into something ungovernable and ineffable.

6. Conclusion

This study has underscored the role of language in reinforcing and challenging binary and heteronormative standards in the university, particularly within Philosophy. These norms operate across macro-level structures, such as institutional policies and curricular frameworks, and micro-level interactions within classrooms, syllabi, and dynamics. As revealed through collaborative autoethnographic narratives, language is not merely a neutral medium of instruction; it is embedded in power structures that shape the lived realities of students and educators. It defines what is intelligible, acceptable, or expressible, contributing to the marginalization of non-normative identities.

Queering pedagogical spaces has emerged as a necessary project for philosophy education. Queer theory in this study functions not only as an analytical lens but also as resistance. It destabilizes rigid linguistic and discursive structures that have upheld exclusionary traditions. By unsettling these norms, queer theory challenges the hegemonic foundations of philosophy that have historically silenced queer experiences. This disruption opens possibilities for inclusive, dynamic, and liberating modes of teaching and learning. As these voices grow visible, it is imperative to cultivate spaces where they are not merely included but centered. Transforming the philosophical classroom requires a shift in both

language and pedagogy. Education must be reconceptualized not only as the transmission of knowledge but also as a process that constructs systems of privilege and exclusion, shapes social relations, and influences how individuals come to understand themselves and others.

In recalling the persistence of language as an instrument and vehicle for transformation and stagnation, this paper has argued its role as both a site and a mechanism for the reproduction of heteronormativity within academic institutions. Nonetheless, bias does not inhere the medium, as shown by queering these linguistic practices which then provides a direct avenue to dismantling these exclusions. This study does not seek to only rethink queer philosophy, rather it pursues a reconstitution of the very language that makes philosophy and philosophizing possible. Queering the language of which philosophy is bound is a reclamation of the promise of philosophy: a discourse which makes room for all who seek to think.

7. Recommendations

This study recommends philosophy departments and educators revisit, modify, and rethink their curriculum, syllabi, and teaching practices to provide genuine inclusivity, moving beyond symbolic gestures to substantive changes that accept various perspectives, experiences, and voices. This effort involves recognizing the important role of linguistic practices in everyday activity as crucial sites for inclusion or exclusion. Educators should be mindful of their language, reminding students and fellow educators to avoid terminologies that marginalize or exclude certain groups, and instead promoting language that acknowledges and values diversity. Beyond curriculum, training for faculty on inclusive teaching practices like using language that acknowledges diversity and creating space for underrepresented perspectives in class discussions could go a long way. Even something as simple as asking students for regular feedback about how they experience the program could help universities see where change is needed. These small shifts, if taken seriously, can make academic spaces intellectually rigorous and more welcoming for everyone. By implementing these recommendations, the program and the department can create safe learning environments that support academic success and well-being.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work is not supported by any funding.

Institutional Board Review Statement

The authors obtained the necessary approvals and permissions from relevant authorities, secured and signed the Attestation for Ethical Consideration and ensured that ethical standards were followed throughout the research's completion. The participants participated voluntarily, and their informed consent was obtained prior to the collection of data, ensuring that they were aware of the research purpose, procedures, and potential risks or benefits, and that their participation would cause no harm or undue distress.

AI Declaration

The authors declare that the following Artificial Intelligence systems were minimally used throughout the study: Assisted Searching, Quillbot and Grammarly for grammar and flow, ChatGPT for Paper Critique (e.g. sweeping statements, statements that need to be cited). All relevant information that was used is cited and referenced accordingly.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.
- Apolo, G. L., Reyna, L. J. L., Cancino, S. B., Ludovico, M. P. G., & Garo, N. S. (2025). Queering the gap: Embracing a queer-inclusive learning process in teaching philosophy. *Lukad: An Online Journal of Pedagogy, Special Issue on Gender and Inclusive Education*, 57–76.
- Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1995.00151.x>
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (Routledge Classics ed.). Routledge.

- Carpenter, C., & Suto, M. (2008). *Qualitative research for occupational and physical therapists: A practical guide*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Chaney, M. P., & Mason, N. (2024). Queering recovery: A proposed model for LGBTQ+-affirmative relapse prevention. *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, 45(1), 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaoc.12128>
- Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F., & Hernandez, K.-A. C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589>
- Fanghanel, J., Pritchard, J., Potter, J., & Wisker, G. (2016). *Defining and developing the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL): A sector-wide study. SOTL audit and capacity-building tool*. Higher Education Academy.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books. <https://archive.org/details/disciplinepunish0000fouc>
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Fricker, M. (2018). Epistemic injustice and recognition theory: A new conversation — Afterword. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.5206/fpq/2018.4.6235>
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>
- Hoogland, R. C. (2023). Heather Love, *Underdogs: Social deviance and queer theory*. *American Literary History*, 35(1), 632–635. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajac289>
- Lapadat, J. C. (2017). Collaborative autoethnography: Ethical inquiry that makes a difference. *13th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.13311.23202>
- Lesutis, G. (2023). Queering as (un)knowing: Ambiguities of sociality and infrastructure. *Progress in Human Geography*, 47(3), 392–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325231173564>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

- Luhmann, S. (1998). Queering/querying pedagogy? Or, pedagogy is a pretty queer thing. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Queer theory in education* (pp. 141–155). Lawrence Erlbaum.
<https://archive.org/details/queertheoryinedu0000unse>
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Ndakolonkoshi, K., Moyo, Z., & Smith, C. (2025). Challenges faced by women assuming senior leadership positions at Namibian higher education institutions. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 5(2), 31–58. <https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353180>
- Opiniano, G., Ramolete, G., Burbano, A., Gil, M., & Ramolete, J. (2024). Towards genderizing Philippine philosophy education: Reflections on the CMO No. 26, Series of 2017. *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy Special Issue*, 149–166. <http://ses-journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/SES-Journal-Special-Issue-on-Gender-and-Culture-June-2024-Article-7.pdf>
- Origenes, R. W. (2022). Life’s journey of trans-woman students: A phenomenological study. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 2(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.53378/352877>
- Pinar, W. F. (Ed.). (1998). *Queer theory in education*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Roy, R., & Uekusa, S. (2020). Collaborative autoethnography: “Self-reflection” as a timely alternative research approach during the global pandemic. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 20(4), 383–392. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-06-2020-0054>
- Rupp, L. J., & Taylor, V. (2024). Learning to be queer. In C. Mayo & M. V. Blackburn (Eds.), *Queer, trans, and intersectional theory in educational practice: Student, teacher, and community experiences* (pp. 71–88). Routledge.
- Scarpetta, S. (2020). *Over the rainbow? The road to LGBTI inclusion*. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/8d2fd1a8-en>
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1993). *Tendencies*. Duke University Press.
- Smith, N. J. (2020). *Capitalism’s sexual history*. Oxford University Press.
- Spelman, E. V. (1988). *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Beacon Press.

- Terry, J. (1991). Theorizing deviant historiography. *Differences*, 3(2), 55–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-3-2-55>
- Ulla, M. B. (2025). Queer teacher agency in the language pedagogy. In *Queer teachers' agency in language education* (pp. 75–91). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83662-930-620251005>
- University of Cambridge. (2025). Intellectual property rights—Research data management. <https://www.data.cam.ac.uk/data-management-guide/creating-your-data/intellectual-property-rights>
- University of Oxford, Research Support. (2021, December 2). Informed consent. <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/consent>
- Wilchins, R. (2004). *Queer theory, gender theory: An instant primer*. Alyson Books.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations* (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). Blackwell.
- Yılmaz, B., Irmak, A., & Oskay, Ü. (2021). Changes in sexual intentions of LGBT people and their adaptation to social life. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 58(4), 1248–1257.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12922>