



Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Gender Mainstreaming Implementation In University Teaching 30 Years After Beijing

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Article History:

Received: 14-10-2024
Revision: 07-12-2024
Accepted: 12-12-2024
Publication: 10-03-2025

Cite this article as:

Miralles-Cardona, C., Chiner, E., Tichá, R., Esteve-Faubel, J. M., Abery, B. H., & Sanhueza-Henríquez, S. V. (2025). Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Gender Mainstreaming Implementation in University Teaching 30 Years after Beijing. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 25(1), 29-44. doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i1.1005

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Abstract: This study explores the perceptions of teacher educators at a public higher education institution in Alicante, Spain, regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming (GM) in university teaching. Addressing a historically under-researched area, the research examines the impact of GM policies on teacher education programs and identifies barriers to the effective integration of a gender-responsive approach. Using qualitative methods, including interviews, document analysis, and a questionnaire, data were collected from nine educators to assess institutional support, policy implementation, and pedagogical engagement with GM. Findings reveal a limited impact of GM policies, largely due to the absence of institutional support, clear guidelines, and structured implementation strategies. Key challenges include resistance to GM, inadequate gender training, and the lack of operational equality plans, highlighting the need for institutional commitment, professional development, and systematic policy enforcement. The study underscores the importance of aligning university teaching with international gender equality standards, particularly Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4.7 and 5. This analysis contributes to global discussions on gender policies in education and offers recommendations for fostering gender-sensitive teaching cultures in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Initial Teacher Education, Teacher Educators' Perceptions, SDG 4, SDG 5

1. Introduction

Gender mainstreaming (GM) is a policy strategy that has been used to advance social justice and equality in education. The concept was introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women and later institutionalized as a global approach to promote gender equality (GE) through the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995), which set the guidelines for its implementation. The term gained prominence in the European Union (EU) in 1991, where it was soon adopted by Member States and gained widespread recognition through various UN conferences. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1997) institutionalized and formally defined GM as:

"The process of assessing the implications ... of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's [and other vulnerable groups] concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that [they] benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated."

Despite its ambitious objectives, GM has encountered significant criticism, conceptual tensions, and terminological confusion, particularly in its application beyond European contexts. When transferred to non-European settings by UN Women, its epistemological and political implications were often overlooked, leading to difficulties in its implementation (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005; Guzura, 2017; Moser, 2007; Walby, 2005). Originally envisioned as a mechanism for transforming institutions, cultural norms, and practices that restricted women's rights, GM was articulated as a process aimed at reshaping power relations (Khalil, 2017). However, its focus extends beyond women's empowerment, as it also examines how policies impact both women and men, ensuring equitable benefits for all (Shang, 2022).

The Beijing Platform for Action and ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 have since been reinforced by additional international mandates, including the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2020, which emphasized that attaining

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gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is essential to achieving progress across all goals and targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly, 2020). The 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) explicitly acknowledges that sustainable development cannot be fully realized without gender equality, women's rights, and empowerment. Within this framework, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education plays a key role, particularly through Target 4.7, which aims to develop knowledge and skills for gender equality, and Target 4.8, which seeks to improve educational institutions by making them more gender-sensitive and responsive. In this context, education for sustainable development (ESD) is instrumental in fostering training in and for gender equality, positioning teacher educators and universities as pivotal actors responsible for embedding a gender perspective in both teaching and research (Bourn et al., 2017).

As higher education institutions (HEIs) play a fundamental role in shaping sustainable development, they have increasingly aligned their missions and values with GM principles. However, the effective integration of GM into university teaching and learning remains an ongoing challenge. Several obstacles persist, including a lack of clarity in GM principles, methodological limitations in its application, insufficient institutional capacity, and resistance to change (UN Women, 2022). While universities have taken steps toward implementing gender-sensitive policies—such as developing equality plans—the extent to which these efforts have translated into a gender-responsive approach to pedagogy and curricula remains uncertain. This raises important questions regarding how gender mainstreaming has been incorporated into university education, what barriers continue to hinder its implementation, and what strategies are being employed by higher education institutions to address these challenges.

Although GM has been extensively studied in policy development, institutional governance, and global commitments, research examining its practical application within university curricula and pedagogical practices remains limited. The gap between institutional policy efforts and classroom-level implementation highlights a critical research gap, particularly regarding how educators navigate GM principles in teaching, what barriers they face, and how effective current initiatives are in fostering gender-sensitive learning environments. As universities are responsible for educating future professionals and policymakers who will drive gender equality initiatives, an in-depth investigation into the current state of GM in higher education teaching is both timely and necessary.

As the 27th anniversary of ECOSOC's adoption of GM and nearly 30 years since the Beijing Platform for Action approach, it is imperative to assess the progress made in integrating GM into university education. By critically examining the extent to which educators and curricula align with GM principles, this study aims to provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of current GM implementation efforts in higher education. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of institutional responses to gender mainstreaming mandates, offer recommendations for strengthening gender-sensitive pedagogy, and highlight areas where further intervention is needed to advance gender equality within the university setting.

2. Literature Review

In the context of higher education, gender mainstreaming (GM) refers to the process of integrating a gender perspective (GP) into teaching, research, and the management of faculties and departments, using gender equality (GE) plans as instruments for its implementation (Cardona-Moltó & Miralles-Cardona, 2022). In the field of teaching, this involves adopting an approach that considers sex and gender as key analytical and explanatory variables. It requires attention to both similarities and differences in the experiences, interests, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors of women, men, and other disadvantaged groups, while also addressing the causes and consequences of inequality. However, many educators lack the necessary training to effectively implement this approach. For GM to succeed in higher education, teacher education (TE) has been recognized as essential to advancing sustainable gender equality. Teacher educators play a crucial role in creating gender awareness and equipping future teachers with the skills, attitudes, and abilities needed to educate future generations and empower them to address gender issues (Capecchi & Gius, 2023; Gough, 2016).

While there is increasing recognition of the importance of providing teachers with GE training to support GM implementation, research on teacher education for SDG 5 remains limited. Teacher education for sustainable gender equality is an emerging area of policy, practice, and research that focuses on the integration of ESD 4.7 and SDG 5 principles into teacher education programs. Fischer et al. (2022) argues that research on TE for sustainable development (SD) expanded significantly following the Decade of ESD and the Global Action Programs, leading to a surge in publications, conferences, and networks that have improved both the conceptual and practical development of the field. However, despite these advancements, further consolidation of research is needed. At an institutional level, current teacher training programs often lack adequate preparation for gender-sensitive practice, with university curricula generally omitting a gender dimension in several countries, including Spain (García-Ramos et al., 2020; Larrondo & Rivero, 2019; Merma-Molina et al., 2021; Prendes-Espinosa et al., 2020; Rebollo-Catalán & Buzón-García, 2021; Reverter-Bañón, 2022) and the universities of the Xarxa Vives (Rodríguez-Jaume & Gil-González, 2021). This issue appears to be consistent across different academic disciplines and countries, indicating that TE for sustainable gender equality has yet to be fully integrated into university curricula (Atchison, 2013; Bothwell, 2022; Brunilla & Kallioniemi, 2018; Gründberg, 2011; Gudbjornsdottir et al., 2017; Kitta & Cardona-Moltó, 2022; Kreitz-Sandberg & Lahelma, 2021; Weiner, 2000; Zippel et al., 2016).

In Europe, efforts to promote gender equality in universities, including impact assessments of GM and gender equality plans, have been implemented on a larger scale. However, structural, cultural, and institutional challenges continue to hinder their full development (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). To address these difficulties and facilitate GM implementation in teaching, research, and innovation, the European Community has funded several projects through the Seventh Framework Program and Horizon 2020, encouraging collaboration among institutions. Despite the establishment of initiatives such as the Gender Equality Academy—a training program designed to drive institutional change—and a network of Communities of Practice (e.g., ACT-on-Gender) aimed at addressing gender inequalities, further work is needed to overcome existing barriers to GM implementation in university settings.

The research reviewed indicates that while extensive studies have been conducted on GE policy and GM requirements, there has been insufficient focus on educational practices and outcomes. This lack of systematic teaching of gender issues at the university level is evident in multiple studies. For instance, Valdivieso et al. (2016) analyzed the presence of gender-related courses in Early Childhood and Elementary Education programs across 44 Spanish universities. Their findings revealed that only 11 universities offered gender-related courses, most of which were electives. Additionally, in five other universities, gender-related content was present in course materials, yet the term ‘gender’ was not explicitly mentioned in course titles. Other studies conducted in Spain (González-Pérez, 2017; Ortega-Sánchez & Pagès-Blanch, 2018; Reverter-Bañón, 2022; Vizcarra et al., 2015) reached similar conclusions, highlighting the neglect of gender education in teacher preparation programs.

At the institution where this study was conducted, an examination of Axis 2 (University Teaching) of the IV Equal Opportunities Plan between Women and Men (University of Alicante, 2022) across all undergraduate degrees reveals that the gender approach in teaching at the curricular level is almost non-existent. According to the III Equal Opportunities Plan between Women and Men (University of Alicante, 2020), which evaluated the teaching guides of all courses across 45-degree programs in five knowledge branches—Arts and Humanities (9 degrees), Sciences (6 degrees), Health Sciences (3 degrees), Social and Legal/Judicial Sciences (17 degrees), and Engineering and Architecture (10 degrees)—only a few degrees incorporated subjects explicitly addressing gender issues. In terms of gender-specific courses within study plans, only three degrees—French Studies, Management and Public Administration, and Sociology—offer compulsory courses with titles that explicitly reference gender issues. Additionally, only four degrees—Criminology, History, Early Childhood Education, and Primary Education—include optional courses with a gender focus. As a result, merely seven out of the 45 degrees (15.55%) offered at the institution include dedicated gender-related courses. In terms of integrating a gender perspective into course objectives and content, only 24 out of 45 degrees (53.33%) contain at least one teaching guide that incorporates gender-related content; 15 degrees (33.33%) include three or more teaching guides with a gender focus; and only five degrees (11.11%) contain five or more teaching guides with gender-sensitive content. Notably, Sociology stands out as the most gender-responsive program, with eight teaching guides incorporating a gender perspective.

Beyond assessing gender content and objectives in degrees and teaching guides, the focus must shift toward outcomes, specifically the development of gender-related competencies among educators and students. However, the lack of research in this area is concerning. Edwards et al.’s (2020) literature review on SDG 4.7 and gender equality highlights the insufficient integration of gender training at all educational levels, including curricula, teacher education, and student assessment. Their review identified only two studies—Grayson and Martin (1984) in primary education in the United States and Acar-Erdol and Gözütok (2018) at the university level in Turkey—demonstrating the benefits of integrating a gender equality curriculum for both teacher educators and students. Edwards et al. emphasize that both teaching and learning play a fundamental role in achieving the SDGs, underscoring the need for assessment and monitoring at multiple levels as a prerequisite for fulfilling SDG 4.7 and SDG 5. Additionally, their study highlights the importance of providing students with transformational experiences that connect them with broader social realities.

Experts in gender studies argue that initial teacher education (ITE) programs must be enhanced by incorporating a theoretically grounded and sustainable gender approach while simultaneously addressing and eliminating existing barriers. Before gender can be effectively mainstreamed into teaching, institutions must conduct comprehensive evaluations to identify specific obstacles and challenges. Universities should establish clear institutional plans outlining their needs, goals, and strategic activities within the framework of gender equality policies. The model developed by the Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities (SALAR) provides a structured process for institutional GM implementation, advocating for a collaborative and accountable approach. According to this model, universities should address key questions, including: (1) how gender policies align with European Community, national, or regional regulations; (2) how institutions ensure that the content of their gender equality plans is integrated into governance documents and degree programs; (3) how gender competencies are developed and effectively transferred into practice; and (4) how GM implementation varies across disciplines, knowledge areas, or professional fields (SALAR, 2010, p. 12, 18).

The central issue is not merely the outcome of integrating a gender-sensitive approach into teaching, but rather establishing a feasible and effective implementation process with well-defined indicators for monitoring and evaluating progress. Sandler (1997) asserts that these indicators are crucial for assessing the level of advancement,

emphasizing that if gender-related actions remain confined to policy discussions without meaningful implementation, substantial change is unlikely to occur in practice.

Building on this context, this study aims to explore the perspectives of teacher educators regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming in university teaching and the factors influencing their engagement with a gender-responsive approach. Specifically, this study focuses on three aspects: (1) the impact of gender equality policies on teacher education programs at the participating institution, which holds a neutral ranking (59.7 out of 100) in the World University Rankings (2023); (2) the factors influencing teacher educators' engagement in gender-sensitive teaching; and (3) the challenges and needs identified by teacher educators for improving the implementation process of gender mainstreaming. Understanding these dimensions will provide valuable insights into the barriers affecting teacher educators' adoption of a gender-responsive approach and will ultimately contribute to advancing curricular reforms that ensure the effective implementation of gender equality policies in higher education.

3. Methodology

The methodology in this study draws on approaches and strategies from mixed methods research, as both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and used at different stages (Creswell, 2013). Mixed methods research is defined as “the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123). Although this study follows a mixed methods approach, it does not assign ‘equal status’ to both methods. The primary emphasis is on qualitative methods; therefore, the research can be classified as ‘qualitative-dominant mixed methods research’ (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 124). This combination enabled an in-depth exploration of the research questions by integrating different perspectives, strategies, and techniques, providing a comprehensive understanding of how teacher educators perceive and experience gender mainstreaming (GM) implementation in their institutions. The primary data sources were individual interviews, surveys, and document analysis.

3.1. Design

To address the research aims, a qualitative descriptive multi-case study design (Merriam, 1998) was used with teacher educators. A case study is an intensive investigation of a person, a group of people, or a unit with the aim of generalizing across multiple units. As Cousin (2005) noted, the case study method is not primarily intended for analysis but rather serves as an effective approach to defining cases and exploring a setting to develop a deeper understanding of its dynamics. In this study, the design was developed to describe in detail the developmental aspects of gender mainstreaming implementation in its real-world context—specifically, university teaching—which requires a precise focus on a specific group of participants..

3.2. Participants

The sample consisted of nine ($N = 9$) teacher educators from the UA College of Education in Spain. This institution was selected for convenience, as some of the authors of this manuscript have professional affiliations there, and there was a need to assess its gender mainstreaming policy implementation in teaching. The nine teacher educators represented the three teacher education degrees (Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education) at the institution and were purposefully selected. According to Maxwell (2013), “purposeful sampling or selection is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 97). Patton (2015) further emphasized that:

"[the] power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 264).

The Participants were selected using a non-probabilistic quota sampling procedure to ensure the representation of diverse subgroups within the teacher-educator population. The selection criteria aimed to balance gender, degrees taught, tenure status, and teaching subjects, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Twelve teacher educators (10%) responded to the invitation, but only nine ultimately participated, out of the 120 total educators across the three-degree programs.

Participants' ages ranged from 34 to 67 years ($M = 49.22$, $SD = 11.09$), and their teaching experience varied from 8 to 28 years ($M = 14.22$, $SD = 6.36$). In terms of academic positions, 50% were associate professors, 35% were lecturers, and 15% were professors. Participants rated their knowledge of gender issues at 6.89 ($SD = 2.20$) on a scale of 10. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the demographic information for the sample..

Table 1: Demographic information about sampled teacher educators

Participants	Age	Gender	Degree	Subject	Position	Prior GM experience
1	67	F	SE	RM	PR	No
2	51	M	EL	ET	AP	Yes
3	48	F	EC	ET	LE	Yes

Participants	Age	Gender	Degree	Subject	Position	Prior GM experience
4	42	M	EL	DI	LE	No
5	36	M	SE	DI	AP	No
6	57	M	EC	DI	AP	No
7	42	F	SE	RM	LE	No
8	61	F	SE	RM	AP	No
9	34	F	SE	DI	LE	Yes

Note. EC = Early Childhood, EL = Elementary, SE = Secondary; RM = Research Methods; ET = Education Theory; DI = Didactics; PR = Professor, AP = Associate Professor, LE = Lecturer

3.3. Data Collection, Ethics and Procedure

The data collection process involved conducting individual interviews with each participant, analyzing relevant documents such as study programs and syllabi, and obtaining participants' assessments of the current state of GM implementation at their institution through a questionnaire. Interviewees were contacted via electronic mail, and those who agreed to participate were fully informed about the nature of the study. Their consent was obtained through a signed consent form. Confidentiality was ensured by guaranteeing that no names would be included in completed files, transcribed interviews, or any other records.

Credibility and reliability were achieved through methodological triangulation, which involved using both qualitative methods (interviews and document analysis) and quantitative methods (questionnaire), as well as multiple data sources from individuals and official documents (Verified Memories of undergraduate and graduate studies and syllabi). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and other scholars (e.g., Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009), the use of multiple data sources, such as semi-structured interviews and surveys with different measurement instruments, enhances data triangulation. Additionally, internal and external validity were strengthened through data triangulation and the use of multiple methods and sources for data collection. While internal validity refers to "the truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, and/or credibility of interpretations and conclusions within the underlying setting or group," external validity is defined as "the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalized across different populations of people, settings, contexts, and times" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, pp. 234–235). This study employed methodological triangulation to deepen the understanding of how teacher educators perceive and experience GM implementation at their institution.

This methodological triangulation followed a sequential triangulation approach, where, according to Morse (1991), "the results of one method are essential for planning the next method" (p. 120). In this regard, the questionnaire results were instrumental in informing, designing, and conducting the semi-structured individual interviews with teacher educators. Regarding generalizability, while the findings of this study may not be directly generalizable to the broader population of teacher educators, they can be applied to other contexts through 'inferring transfer,' a concept introduced by Saldaña (2013), in which key assertions are drawn from the particular to the general. As such, the findings may serve as a reference for other colleges of education, educational administrative teams, and teacher educators in similar institutions within and beyond different communities in Spain. This study was deemed exempt from review by the Institution's Ethics Committee.

3.3.1. Interviews

Due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, most semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone or videoconference to accommodate participants who preferred remote communication. The interviews lasted 40–45 minutes on average and were conducted during the second semester of the 2019–2020 academic year, scheduled at a mutually convenient time. The researcher asked open-ended questions (see Interview Guide in Appendix A) and used probing questions when necessary (Kvale, 1994). All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The interview guide was structured around three main themes: (1) the impact of GM implementation on study plans and course content, (2) factors influencing teacher educators' engagement in teaching with a gender approach, and (3) self-identified challenges and needs for effectively improving the implementation process. Before data collection, the guide was pretested with two experts affiliated with the UA Institute for Gender Studies Research. The initial question in the interview was: "Do you believe that gender and GE training are important for initial teacher preparation?" Interviewees were also asked about their views on the College of Education's management of GM implementation and the factors influencing their decision to teach using a gender-responsive approach.

3.3.2. Document Analysis

Using qualitative content analysis, nine syllabi (teaching guides) from the courses taught by participating teacher educators were examined. These included two syllabi from Early Childhood Education, three from Elementary Education, and four from Secondary Education degrees. The analysis focused on identifying the presence of terms such as 'gender,' 'gender equity,' 'gender equality,' 'equal opportunities,' and 'gender disparities' in the competencies and course descriptions of each degree's teaching guides.

The syllabi were retrieved from the website of the participating university (www.ua.es). Among the nine syllabi analyzed, half were from undergraduate courses and the other half from graduate courses. The syllabi encompassed three main subject areas: approximately half focused on didactics, one-third on diagnosis and

research methods, and nearly one-fourth on the theory and philosophy of education. The collected data were examined for key terms or phrases indicating gender-related concepts or equity principles. Memos or document summaries were then generated to organize and analyze the findings.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to assess teacher educators' perceptions of the current state of gender mainstreaming (GM) implementation in teaching at the College of Education. The questionnaire included 23 questions, with 10 items related to demographic information and 13 items assessing perceptions of personal/professional commitment (7 items) and institutional/departmental commitment (6 items) to GM. Responses were evaluated using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*).

The Personal/Professional Commitment subscale had a minimum score of 7 and a maximum score of 42. A score of 14 was categorized as 'poor commitment,' while a score of 35 or higher denoted 'excellent commitment.' Similarly, on the Institutional/Departmental Commitment subscale, a score of 12 was considered low, whereas a score of around 30 indicated high commitment.

The content validity of the questionnaire was assessed using Lawshe's (1975) algorithm. The questionnaire was reviewed by four experts to evaluate item relevance and content validity, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of .97, which is considered very strong (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated, yielding a coefficient of .87, indicating high internal consistency. While these indices may be subject to uncertainty due to the small sample size, they provide preliminary evidence that the questionnaire, "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Gender Mainstreaming Implementation in Teaching," is psychometrically sound in terms of item characteristics, scale reliability, and content validity.

3.4. Data Analysis

For Part I of the study (interviews), a qualitative content analysis was conducted based on the interviewees' responses. The analysis followed a consensus-based approach and adhered to phenomenological research procedures (Creswell, 2013). Transcribed interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The transcripts were segmented into distinct components, analyzed for similarities and differences, and subsequently conceptualized and categorized. To enhance credibility, peer debriefing was employed, involving at least three authors of this manuscript to examine emerging assumptions and findings (Patton, 2002). Categories were established based on emerging concepts from the data, observations made during interviews, and additional documents (e.g., teaching guides) to ensure triangulation. Each category was labeled according to the data it represented and analyzed individually to identify the conditions that led to its emergence and the contextual factors involved (Glaser, 1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data were subjected to multiple readings to identify constructs, themes, and emerging patterns.

For Part II of the study (teaching guide analysis), a two-stage qualitative content analysis was conducted. Stage 1 involved a thorough reading of the syllabi to gain a comprehensive understanding of the competencies to be developed, the expressed goals, and the content covered. Stage 2 focused on determining the relationships between competencies, goals, and content.

For Part III (questionnaire data), descriptive statistics were calculated, including mean, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Credibility was ensured through methodological triangulation, incorporating both qualitative techniques (interviews and document analysis) and quantitative methods (questionnaire data). Interview quotes were labeled as EC (Early Childhood), EL (Elementary), or SE (Secondary), followed by a participant number (1-9). These data were systematized into matrices and tables to help organize and present the findings effectively.

4. Results

Findings are presented organized by objectives and main themes and sub-themes as they emerged from the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

4.1. Impact of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy on Education Degrees

The prevailing view among participants regarding the impact of the GM strategy on university teaching was that GM has had very little influence on instruction. The analysis of undergraduate and graduate TE degrees and study programs revealed that none of these programs included a mandatory course on gender equity. The course *Education for Gender Equality* was the only elective available; however, due to its optional nature, not all students were guaranteed to enrol in it. As a result, there was no assurance that all student teachers would acquire a foundational level of gender competency. One interviewee described this phenomenon as follows:

"Degrees in the College of Education do not include a specific commitment to developing gender equity competence; hence, study plans have not been designed with this purpose in mind. It can be said that they are gender blind." (SE1)

Other interviewees highlighted the disconnect between theory and practice in the implementation of GM, pointing out that while new initiatives have been introduced through legislation on GE policy, very few changes

have been reflected in study programs:

"There is specific regulation that explicitly requires the incorporation of gender equality in the initial training of future teachers, but at the classroom level, very few changes have been made." (EL3)

"I have not seen significant changes. The impact has been occasional and not systemic." (EC6)

Gender mainstreaming was largely perceived as an optional and sporadic intervention. Without mandatory coursework, GE regulations were not reflected in degree programs, leading to a lack of commitment from teaching staff. Instead of being embedded in the philosophy of study programs, gender issues remained peripheral:

"There have been hardly any changes in study plans... [Gender] has not been treated transversally in the different subjects." (SE8)

"As far as I know, a course addressing this issue has been incorporated into the curricula, but it is optional when I believe it should be mandatory." (SE9)

Furthermore, an analysis of teaching guides revealed that gender was not integrated into course content, as shown in Table 2. A careful review of the curriculum indicated that gender was not mentioned in most syllabi. Out of the nine teaching guides analyzed, only one (Cod. 11998) demonstrated some alignment between the competencies outlined in the syllabi and the course goals and content. None of the indicators (competencies, course description, goals, or course content) in the teaching guides coded as 12192, 17516, 12031, and 12078 made any reference to gender. The teaching guides for courses coded 17310, 17313, 12023, and 17511 did reference the principle of GE, but its development was not evident in the course description or other curricular components.

When asked about GM implementation, informants unanimously agreed that the College of Education had not effectively incorporated a gender perspective into university teaching. Their responses further illustrated the issue:

"I think not. The Equality Plan does not offer specific guidelines nor require colleges to plan instruction incorporating a gender perspective in teaching. Hence, with a few exceptions, courses do not include gender as part of their content." (SE1)

"I believe that the College of Education has taken significant steps in this regard, which can be observed, for example, in the number of Ph.D. candidates specializing in gender equity issues and the number of master's theses addressing gender topics." (EL2)

"I think some efforts are being made, but they remain isolated. There are groups of educators working on these issues, but a unified, comprehensive teaching plan is needed for the entire College." (EC3)

Table 2: Summary of content analysis from degrees and teaching guides

Course Code	Degree	Competencies	Course descrip	Objectives	Course content	Other
12192*	3	O	O	O	O	O
11998*	3	GC7: Design and develop learning spaces, with special attention to equity, equal rights and opportunities between men and women, civic education and respect for human rights that facilitate living in society, decision-making and building a sustainable future.	O	Recognize situations of inequality in relation to gender and promote educational actions that promote equality between men and women within the school organizat.	Family changes and new gender roles. The democratization of family relationships. GE and coeducation. Prevention of gender-based violence.	Gender and curriculum: contributions of gender to the study and practice of the curriculum.
17310*	1	GC1: Ethical commitment. Show attitudes consistent with ethical and deontological concepts, while respecting and promoting democratic values, gender equality, non-discrimination of people with disabilities, equity and respect for human rights.	O	O	O	O
17313*	1	GC1: Ethical commitment. Show attitudes consistent with ethical and deontological conceptions, while respecting and promoting democratic values, gender equality, non-discrimination, equity and respect human rights.	O	O	O	O

Course Code	Degree	Competencies	Course descrip	Objectives	Course content	Other
12023*	3	EC3: Design and regulate learning environments that address GE, and respect. GC7: Design and develop learning spaces, with special attention to equity, equal rights and opportunities between men and women, civic education and respect for human rights that facilitate living in society, decision-making and building a sustainable future.	O	O	O	O
17511**	2	Promote actions to develop equal opportunities and compensate for inequalities of origin that affect students when entering the center.	O	O	O	O
17516**	2	O	O	O	O	O
12031*	3	O	O	O	O	O
12078*	3	O	O	O	O	O

O = No reference GE issues; 1 = Early Childhood, 2 = Elementary, 3 = Secondary; *Required Subject; **Core Subject; GC1= Degree General Competency 1; GC7 = Degree General Competency 7. *Note*¹. Course codes correspond to the codes that the UA College of Education assign to the subjects/courses of teacher education degrees. *Note*². Course description, objectives and course content are summarized content extracted from courses syllabi.

4.2. Factors Influencing Educators' Involvement in Mainstreaming Gender in Teaching

The participants' responses were categorized into four types of factors that were identified throughout the interviews: institutional, departmental, professional, and personal factors. Table 3 provides a compilation of the most representative quotes. At an institutional level, the interviewees highlighted the absence of leadership from the College, as well as the need for a well-defined GE plan that included specific and mandatory guidelines and action steps for implementation. In addition, they perceived that their departments were even less committed compared to the College when it came to including a GP in teaching. At a professional level, the interviewees indicated that educators were not sufficiently academically incentivized and that there was a lack of preparation, sensitivity, and awareness regarding the topic. Other factors affecting teacher educators' involvement in teaching with a GP identified by the interviewees were lack of interest, motivation, or knowledge among faculty members, as well as lack of prior experience.

Table 3: Factors affecting educators' intention to teach with a gender perspective

Factors	Quotes
Institutional	<p><i>I believe that the College does not have a plan that includes specific guidelines and requirements to help design gender-sensitive teaching guides. If there was, educators will follow it and implement it. (SE1)</i></p> <p><i>Faculty must lead this project in order to create a climate conducive to GM implementation. (EC6)</i></p> <p><i>There should be a greater commitment from the teaching staff. There is a lack of general guidelines that allow educators to incorporate the gender perspective in their classes. (EC3)</i></p> <p><i>For me, it's necessary to design lesson plans and proposals that support teacher educators in the task of incorporating a GP into their daily practice. Having a person who is in charge of coordinating all actions is essential. (SE7)</i></p> <p><i>Providing specific resources ... and disseminating successful initiatives would help getting educators involved. (SE9)</i></p>
Departmental	<p><i>My department is even less sensitized than the College. Gender and gender equity issues are not given the importance they really have. The neutrality to the subject is evident. (SE1)</i></p> <p><i>There should be a gender equality specialist in each department. (EL2)</i></p> <p><i>Departments should control educators' involvement in teaching with a gender perspective. (EC3)</i></p> <p><i>In most cases, departments do not do what is necessary. They limit themselves to transferring information they receive from the university or the College. They do not provide indications on how gender issues should be mainstreamed. Clearly, there is a lack of involvement. (SE7)</i></p> <p><i>Recognition of faculty work on this issue is necessary. (SE5)</i></p>
Professional	<p><i>Faculty are not sufficiently incentivized. (SE1)</i></p> <p><i>Professional motivation is always a key element. There is a lack of motivation on this topic. (EL2)</i></p> <p><i>Inadequate preparation for the topic is a real barrier to developing the project at university level. (EC6)</i></p> <p><i>Lack of awareness ... Studies at the College are highly feminized, which can lead educators to think that a gender perspective is not necessary. The low presence of men in classes makes the debate difficult. (SE7)</i></p> <p><i>In my case, working with other colleagues in this field (educator circles) has made me notice aspects that I did not notice before, which has increased my commitment to working on this topic. (SE9)</i></p>
Personal	<p><i>Gender is not perceived as an important issue in teacher preparation. (SE1)</i></p>

Factors	Quotes
	<i>From my view, there is a positive will to implement GM, but it would need clear guidelines, support and collaborative work to implement the plan. (SE8)</i>
	<i>The belief that a gender perspective can be incorporated into any subject should be enforced. It is necessary to develop gender competence to carry out this commitment. (SE7)</i>
	<i>I believe that everyone's personal experience is key to change their attitude and disposition towards this topic. (SE9)</i>

Note. Factors were identified from the categories and themes emerged from the content analysis of the interviews.

All these viewpoints were congruent with the interviewees' perceptions of personal/professional and institutional/departmental commitment to GM, as assessed through the questionnaire. As reflected in Table 4, respondents scored the College's commitment to GM around the midpoint of the scale (3.70), which indicated a neutral commitment towards GM. Item 9 ($M = 2.89$) received the lowest rating, indicating that the statement 'GP receives sufficient attention in the courses that make up the study plans' was not well supported. On the other hand, Item 13 ($M = 5.11$) received the highest rating, suggesting that the statement 'Faculty feel little prepared to incorporate a gender approach in teaching' was strongly supported by the majority of the respondents. Conversely, individuals' personal/professional commitment was rated higher than the commitment they attributed to the College ($M = 4.30$), being characterized as acceptable. In summary, the data obtained from the questionnaire aligns with the data obtained from the interviews, confirming that the participants perceived a lack of institutional/departmental commitment and inadequate planning, organization and preparation for the successful implementation of a gender-responsive teaching approach.

Table 4: Teacher educators' perceptions of commitment to GM implementation

	Min-Max	M	Agree SD	f	%
Personal and Professional Commitment					
1. Training for gender equality is a priority issue in my College.	2-6	4.67	1.41	4	44
2. All courses should be taught with a gender perspective.	4-6	5.44	0.88	7	78
3. There should be at least one required course on gender issues in the curricula.	3-6	5.00	1.50	6	67
4. I consider that my training in gender is sufficient.	1-5	3.22	1.56	3	33
5. I tend to incorporate gender content in the courses I teach.	1-6	3.89	1.69	3	33
6. I strive to include curricular objectives and content for the development of my students' gender competencies.	1-6	4.22	1.56	4	44
7. My teaching guides reflect the incorporation of a gender perspective.	1-6	3.67	1.58	3	33
Total factor	2.86-5.86	4.30	1.15		
Institutional and Departmental Commitment					
8. An emphasis on gender issues is clearly reflected in degrees/study plans.	2-6	3.22	0.97	0	0
9. GM receives sufficient attention in the subjects that make up the study plans.	2-6	2.89	1.05	1	11
10. The College has taken a proactive approach to incorporating the GE plan in teaching.	2-6	4.00	1.22	3	33
11. Faculty are sensitive enough to gender issues.	2-6	3.33	1.22	2	22
12. My department encourages faculty to incorporate a GP into teaching assignments.	2-6	3.67	1.32	2	22
13. In general, faculty feel little prepared to mainstream a gender approach into teaching.	2-6	5.11	1.05	7	78
Total factor	2.67-4.50	3.70	0.65		

Range 1-6 (Min. 1, Max. 6, mid point 3.50)

4.3. Self-Identified Challenges and Needs to Effectively Improve Teaching with a Gender Perspective

When teacher educators were asked about challenges, problems, and needs related to improving GM implementation, their responses reflected the necessity of a structured plan, agreed upon by the teaching staff and coordinated by a board with departmental representatives. Two interviewees highlighted this need:

"It is urgent to design an action plan in collaboration with the teaching staff that includes clear and concrete guidelines to: (1) emphasize the gender perspective in study plans and (2) ensure that at least all core subjects include a gender component ..." (EC3)

"A board with representatives from different departments should be created for curriculum adaptation, ensuring that competencies to be developed and block contents clearly reference gender and gender equity issues." (EL2)

A recurring theme was the need to create working groups (professional learning communities) and establish coordination at the departmental level to ensure the integration of a gender approach into all subjects. One interviewee expressed:

"In addition to receiving guidelines from the College, departments should sensitize and encourage their faculty to incorporate a gender perspective in their classes. This can be done, for example, through the creation of a 'GE commission' that guides teaching staff, analyzes and evaluates the incorporation of the gender perspective into teaching guides, and offers strategies for implementation." (EL4)

Another identified challenge was the need for professional development for both teaching and administrative staff:

"Teacher educators at the College must recognize that future teachers need to be prepared to address inequality in their classrooms. Working on these aspects during initial training will help them in their professional practice." (SE7)

"Raising awareness about gender equality is essential, along with fostering a clear understanding of its importance and the need for actions that promote gender equity." (SE9)

Given the diverse nature of different fields of knowledge, some interviewees suggested:

"Preparing a dossier of examples by area of knowledge and model lessons incorporating various methods and strategies to mainstream a gender perspective into subjects could be practically helpful." (EC6)

Above all, a change in mindset and attitude was emphasized:

"Ultimately, it is the teacher who is responsible for integrating a gender perspective into their assignments. The most important factor is an attitude of commitment to transformation and change." (SE9)

Lastly, when asked about the strategies they used in their classes to mainstream gender, interviewees expressed uncertainty. Their responses revealed variations in intention and involvement. The following quotes exemplify this:

"In my first year, I focused on laying the groundwork, learning, and studying. In the second year, I began applying a gender equality perspective in my classes. Now, in my third year, I feel more confident and capable of teaching with a gender-sensitive lens. It has been a journey with challenges to overcome. Today, the subject, the students, and I have evolved. We have been transformed forever." (LE2)

"Depending on the nature of the subjects I teach, I incorporate gender equality in different ways, but it is a challenging task without proper training." (EC3)

"I include activities that explore social inequalities in power relations based on gender, but not on a regular basis." (EC6)

5. Discussion

This study explored teacher educators' perceptions of gender mainstreaming (GM) implementation in university teaching at a public institution in Spain. The findings contribute to the growing body of research on gender equality (GE) in teacher education, offering a critical perspective from educators who are directly involved in curriculum development and instruction. While previous research has examined the impact of GE policies on degrees, study plans, and subjects through document analysis (e.g., Ortega-Sánchez & Pagès-Blanch, 2018; Valdivieso, 2016; Vizcarra et al., 2015) and explored students' perspectives (e.g., Kitta & Cardona-Moltó, 2022), this study addresses the less-explored viewpoint of teacher educators, shedding light on the institutional and pedagogical challenges they face in integrating a gender-responsive approach into their teaching.

Findings highlight three critical areas in the GM implementation process. First, despite institutional policies advocating for GE, the impact of GM on teacher education degrees remains limited, as evidenced by the absence of mandatory gender-focused coursework. While elective courses exist, they do not ensure systematic incorporation of gender perspectives across study programs, leaving future educators without essential gender competencies. Second, educators' engagement with GM is influenced by institutional gaps—a lack of structured GE plans, inadequate training, and the absence of a coordinated strategy across departments hinder their ability to integrate gender issues meaningfully into teaching. Third, challenges and needs for improving GM implementation center on the demand for clear guidelines, professional development, and institutional support mechanisms, including the establishment of working groups and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Although participants expressed concerns over the limited institutional commitment to GM, there were signs of positive engagement. Some educators demonstrated individual agency, seeking training and actively incorporating gender-sensitive approaches despite the absence of institutional mandates. However, without a coordinated and structured approach, such efforts remain fragmented. A comprehensive transformation requires alignment between institutional policies and pedagogical practice, ensuring that GM is embedded at all levels of teacher education rather than being perceived as an optional or isolated initiative.

To advance GM implementation, several key processes must be prioritized. First, a critical reflection on GM policies is needed to move beyond compliance and foster a social justice-oriented framework (Daly, 2005; Eveline & Bacchi, 2005; Williams, 2004). Second, targeted gender training for teacher educators must be integrated into professional development, as one-time workshops or seminars are insufficient for sustained curricular transformation (Aguilar-Ródenas, 2013; Brandt et al., 2019; Miralles-Cardona, 2020). Third, institutional resistance to gender policies must be addressed through systematic efforts, including policy enforcement, leadership engagement, and faculty accountability (Daly, 2005; Eveline & Bacchi, 2005). Finally, equality plans

should be operationalized with specific guidelines for teaching, assessment, and monitoring, following best practices from European frameworks such as those recommended by the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research (2016).

Implementing these actions will bridge the gap between policy and practice, fostering a gender-sensitive institutional culture that aligns personal and institutional commitments to GM. Recognizing how teacher educators' beliefs and attitudes towards gender align with institutional priorities is essential for sustaining ideological and curricular transformation (Kitta & Cardona-Moltó, 2022). Ultimately, universities must take proactive steps to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in ways that ensure its integration into teacher education, equipping future educators with the competencies needed to promote gender equity in their professional practice. (Ortega-Sánchez & Pagès-Blanch, 2018).

6. Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be considered. The combination of data from different response formats (interviews, questionnaires, document analysis) could be seen as a limitation. Close attention was paid to potential differences in the quantity, quality, and depth of responses, which were fairly minor. Additionally, the selection of informants and interactions during the interview process may have influenced the quality of the data. While this approach gives a voice to a self-selected group of teacher educators, it also carries the risk that other groups of educators remain unheard. Clearly, the intention is not to generalize the findings of this study from a small sample but rather to contribute to the study of GM implementation in teaching by providing insights from a specific group of teacher educators.

Future research directions could explore how to implement a whole-institution approach to GM, following the guidelines of the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research (2016), and examine how other institutions have successfully developed structures and cultures that promote gender equality and GM implementation. Investigating unexplored areas of GM implementation and understanding how institutions are addressing the developmental challenges of gender mainstreaming would be valuable. Additionally, comparing the perspectives of student teachers, educators, and management teams would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to integrating a gender perspective into initial teacher education. Triangulating these perspectives while employing both quantitative and qualitative methods would yield deeper insights into the factors hindering the incorporation of GM in teacher education programs.

7. Conclusion

This study reveals a concerning discrepancy between the stated commitment to gender mainstreaming in educational policy and its practical implementation in teacher education programs. Despite policies advocating for gender equality, tangible impacts on curricula and teaching approaches remain limited. The findings highlight the multifaceted barriers that hinder effective GM implementation and underscore the need for a concerted effort at all levels of the institution. Universities must take meaningful steps to develop structured gender training programs, establish collaborative working groups, and create mechanisms to foster a more gender-responsive curriculum. Moving forward, comprehensive research should examine whole-institution approaches to GM, incorporating comparative perspectives from stakeholders across the university community. Ultimately, achieving the potential of gender mainstreaming in higher education is essential for fostering an environment that advances gender equity and prepares future professionals to uphold these values in their fields.

Acknowledgement Statement: The authors would like to thank to all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: Author 1 contributed to the Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, and Writing - Original Draft; Author 2 contributed to Software, Validation, and Data Curation; Author 3 contributed to Validation, Investigation, and Resources; Author 4 contributed to Validation, Data Curation, Investigation; Author 5 and 6 contributed to Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision and Project Administration.

Funding Statement: This research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033), the European Union (NextGenerationEU/PRTR) Grants #FJC2020-046278-I and PID2022-142830NB-I00, with additional support from the University of Alicante (Grants#FJC2020-046278-I and #GRE22-06B).

Data Availability Statement: Data is available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

- 1) Do you believe that gender equity is an important issue in teacher training?
- 2) What impact do you think gender equality policy has had on university teaching in the field of teacher preparation? Do you think that the design of study plans and the development of course syllabi have changed in any way since the publication of PL 3/2007? In which one/ones?
- 3) Do you think that the College of Education is doing what is necessary to make possible the inclusion of gender issues in university teaching?
- 4) What factors do you think affect the teaching staff's decision to incorporate a gender perspective in the courses they teach?
- 5) Considering that the inclusion of a gender perspective in university teaching is a legal requirement endorsed in international agreements and national/community regulations, how do you think its incorporation into teaching could be made effective?
- 6) If you are a teacher educator already initiated in mainstreaming a gender perspective in teaching, indicate how you do it? (e.g. What strategies do you use?)

Appendix B

Teacher Educators Questionnaire on Gender Mainstreaming Implementation in University Teaching

Part I

Participants' Demographics

1. Age: _____ years old
2. Gender: Female Male Other sexual identity: _____
3. Position:
 Assistant Professor Associate Professor Lecturer Professor Other (*specify*): _____
4. Area of specialization: _____
5. Number of years of experience in teacher education: _____ years
6. In the last years, what is the course you have taught most often? _____
7. ¿From what degree?
 Early Childhood Elementary Education MA on Secondary Education
8. Using a scale from 1 to 10 being 1 = *Very little committed* and 10 = *Very committed*, how would you rate the commitment of your colleagues to mainstream a GP into teaching? _____
9. Using a scale from 1 (*Very low*) to 10 (*Very high*), how would you rate your knowledge and skills to teach with a gender perspective: _____
10. Does your College of Education have a gender equality plan? Yes No

Part II**Teacher Educators' Questionnaire on Gender Mainstreaming Implementation in University Teaching**

Using a six-point Likert scale, please rate your degree of agreement with the statements that follow.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Teacher training for gender equality is an issue that takes priority in my College of Education.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	An emphasis in gender issues is clearly reflected in degrees and study plans.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Gender mainstreaming receives sufficient attention in course content.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	All courses should be taught with a gender perspective.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	There should be at least one mandatory course that focuses on gender in study plans.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	The College has taken a proactive approach to implementing the gender equality plan.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Faculty are sensitive enough to gender issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I consider that my training in gender is sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I incorporate gender content in the courses I teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I strive to include curricular content for the development of my students' gender competencies.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	My teaching guides reflect the incorporation of a gender perspective.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	My department encourages faculty to incorporate a gender perspective into teaching assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I think that faculty feel little prepared to mainstream a gender approach into teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you very much for your collaboration!